SAQA

SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning in South Africa

Country Background Report prepared for the OECD Thematic Review on Recognition of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning in South Africa

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Executive summary

Background

1. This country background report on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in South Africa has been prepared by the South African Qualifications Authority as participant in the OECD activity on Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning (RNFIL).

2. The RNFIL activity was initiated following a recent OECD activity that investigated the role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning (OECD, 2005) during which the recognition of non-formal and informal learning was identified as an important issue that required further study. The overall purpose of the RNFIL activity is to provide policy makers with information for generating beneficial and equitable systems of recognising non-formal and informal learning. The project aims to explore existing models by taking stock of existing arrangements, and collecting and exploring related evidence. Working methods include desk-based research, field research, commissioned papers, workshops and an electronic discussion group.

3. The terminology used in this report is based on *The recognition of prior learning in the context of the South African NQF* (SAQA, 2002) and the *Criteria and guidelines for the implementation of the recognition of prior learning* (SAQA, 2004). The report constitutes a work-in-progress that will be further supplemented with data and findings from various South African and international stakeholders.

4. The report is structured according to the guidelines provided by the OECD Secretariat, and contains the six components listed below.

Contextual factors

5. The South African NQF was implemented in 1995 and provides the context wherein South African education and training takes place with a population of nearly 50 million, of which more than 41% live in poorer rural areas, and close to 54% are 24 years or younger.

6. South Africa is experiencing rapid urban migration especially in the 20-34 age group, with rural areas being left with high proportions of households headed by young female adults who are mothers.

7. The legacy of apartheid remains a significant challenge in South Africa with various formal and informal initiatives underway to improve the level of education of black people and women in particular.

8. Between 1995 and 2004 the total number of qualifications awarded increased with an average annual growth rate of 4.3%, with the highest growth in four-year first degrees, honours degrees and master's degrees.

9. Some changes in admission policies at higher education institutions have taken place, but have been limited by staff and resource shortages.

10. While all education and training quality assurance bodies (ETQAs) have developed recognition of prior learning (RPL) policies in order to comply with SAQA requirements, implementation plans and projects have been developed in only a few sectors.

11. Approximately 1% of the South African population are citizens from other countries, mostly from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (69%). Qualifications obtained outside South

Africa are evaluated by SAQA, with the majority of applications falling into the highly skilled grouping, originating mostly from Zimbabwe (31% in 2006).

12. All nationally recognised qualifications are recorded on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), and include both unit standards-based qualifications and non-unit standards-based qualifications.

13. South Africa has in recent years achieved a high level of macro stability, though the levels of inequality remain high (Gini coefficient = 0.35) but are no longer solely based on racial divisions.

14. High levels of unemployment exist, particularly in the under-30 age group (49% in 2002), and are also higher for women than for men. There has been a reduction in craft and related trades, while most African employees remain in elementary occupations.

15. Fewer than 9% of adults between 15-64 years are illiterate.

16. By 2002 there were more than 33 000 established public institutions and registered independent institutions in South Africa catering for more than 13.5 million learners.

17. In 2002 the overall pass rate for the Senior Certificate (matric) was 68.9%, of whom 16.9% passed with an endorsement for entry to higher education.

18. Primary school enrolment exceeds 100%.

19. In 2000 one million learners were participating in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes, while more than 500 000 adult learners were in the Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) system.

Institutional arrangements

20. Four phases in the transformation of the South African education and training system can be identified: (1) 1990-1994: structural stasis and cultural malaise; (2) 1994-1996: manifestation of policy and emergence of new structures; (3) 1997-1999: general reappraisal of policy; (4) 2000 and on: focus on implementation.

21. A national skills levy fund was established in 1998; by 2004 more than 70 000 learnerships had been awarded and over 350 000 certificates awarded for skills development activities.

22. Despite various successes, the labour market remains concerned about the relevance of the schooling curriculum and of higher education; this is currently being addressed through various initiatives, such as the establishment of a qualifications framework for the occupational sector.

23. SAQA was established in 1995 and has overseen the development and implementation of the NQF since 1997. This included overseeing the establishment of 12 National Standards Bodies and more than one hundred Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs), as well as the accreditation of 31 ETQAs. These structures are currently being reviewed.

24. Roleplayers included in non-formal and informal learning include the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, the South African Qualifications Authority, the Council on Higher Education, Umalusi, ETQAs, professional bodies and councils and the National Skills Authority.

25. Extensive legislation has been promulgated, driven largely by the transformational agenda still dominant in the country. Examples

include the Higher Education Act (1997), SAQA Act (1995), Skills Development Act (RSA, 1998c) and FET Act (RSA, 1998d).

26. Two current statutory regulations are inhibiting the development and implementation of RPL: (1) Matriculation with endorsement as entry requirement into higher education; and (2) the 50% residency clause.

27. At present there is no formal systemic funding for RPL in South Africa.

28. In terms of costing, the national policy guideline is that RPL services should not cost more than a full-time face-to-face programme.

29. A limited number of assessment centres focusing on RPL have been established based on local needs, which is in contrast to the priority given to RPL in national policy.

Technical arrangements

30. In South Africa the term RPL is used for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and is defined as 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.

31. Measurement of learning takes place against specific learning outcomes for a specific qualification and may lead to achievement of credits towards the qualification.

32. Two types of RPL have emerged in South Africa: (1) RPL for credit, usually associated with general and further education and training); and (2) RPL for access, usually associated with higher education.

33. Different approaches to RPL have also emerged: (1) credit-exchange: the ability of the individual to perform certain job tasks to a pre-determined standard; (2) developmental: the emphasis is on what the learner has learned – rather than matching competence with pre-agreed standards, the curriculum and institutional prescriptions are used to determine 'acceptable' prior learning; (3) radical: the collective rather than the individual becomes the focus – only the experience of the emancipated group counts as knowledge; and (4) Trojan horse: an enquiry into the social construction of knowledge and curricula in ways in which both experiential knowledge and discipline-based knowledge move closer to (and complement) each other.

34. In the South African context, and as located with the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF), RPL supports the transformation of education and training and is underpinned by a holistic approach to the process and execution of assessment that is both developmental and incremental. RPL is implemented in a variety of contexts, ranging from Further Education and Training (FET), General Education and Training (GET) and higher education, to ABET and workplace-based training.

35. Three target groups exist: (1) access group: under-qualified adult learners wanting to up-skill and improve their qualifications, as well as candidates lacking minimum requirements for entry into a formal learning programme; (2) redress group: workers on the shop floor or in the workplace who may be semi-skilled and even unemployed – they may have worked for many years but were prevented from developing due to restrictive past policies; (3) candidates who exit formal education prematurely and who have, over a number of years, built up learning through short learning programmes.

36. The greatest number of RPL candidates fall between NQF levels 2 and 4, in the main those that do not have a school-leaving certificate.
37. Prior learning is often unstructured, tacit and intuitive, requiring the assessor to identify to identify equivalencies to the evidence required to prove applied competence through an integrated assessment of the learning field.
38. The South African NQF is, in its current form, not a credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system; although it can be developed to be as it is a credit-based system.
39. Aspects that may have a limiting effect on the portability of qualifications include entrenched institutional practices, the drive for profit and the 50% residency clause. Recent developments that support credit accumulation and transfer include the registration of generic qualifications on the NQF and the inclusion of professional qualifications on the NQF.
40. The quality of assessment within the NQF relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency.
41. There is a no fundamental difference between the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through a current learning programme; the only difference lies in the route to the assessment.
42. The purpose of RPL is identifying what the candidate knows and can do, matching the candidate's skills and knowledge to specific standards, assessing the candidate against those standards and crediting the candidate.
43. The form, quality and sources of evidence that will lead to the attainment of credits depend on the particular qualification; care should be taken neither to require too much evidence nor to expect the candidate to completely cover the syllabus.
44. Candidate support should not be underestimated, and should as far as possible include the possibility for candidates to choose the assessment methodologies they are most comfortable with.
45. The 'nested' approach to standards generation and qualifications specification is a useful way in which to understand what should be assessed in an RPL process.
46. A generic RPL process could include the following: preparatory phase, assessment phase, and if need be, an appeals process.

Stakeholder behaviour

47. Data on people who have completed RPL is not readily available mainly due to difficulties experienced during uploads to the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), but also due to the decision that certificates issued to RPL candidates will not specify that an RPL route was followed.
48. RPL is viewed as central to the goals of redress and transformation, although progress towards redress in the workplace is perceived as limited.
49. While a number of RPL pilot projects have been undertaken since 2002 when the SAQA RPL Policy was developed, these were only partially successful, with concerns related to lack of information on RPL tools and procedures, inappropriate assessment tools, lack of opportunity to prepare and general lack of understanding from the candidates noted.

Case studies

50. Three case studies are discussed in detail: Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) aimed at unskilled workers in the building industry; Free State Higher Education Consortium (FSHEC) that aims to widen participation and access of learners to higher education; South African Insurance Sector, developed out of the need to comply with new legislation.

Conclusion

51. The two main purposes of RPL in South Africa are access and redress and take place within a range of differing contexts.
52. RPL should be an integrated feature of assessment policies of ETQAs and their constituent providers.
53. The key challenge for the implementation of RPL in South Africa is sustainability.
54. RPL, on its own, is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment in South Africa, but is a key developmental strategy that should be further prioritised in the South African context.

Way forward

55. The current version of the South African country report will be further developed considering the following: (1) inclusion of additional South African RPL roleplayers in critiquing the current version but also to add value and additional interpretations; (2) additional data on RPL completions will be sourced from ETQAs; (3) additional case studies will be added.
56. The South African report will be further complemented by field research, commissioned papers and workshops.

Component 1: Contextual factors

Development of the South African NQF

South Africa's National Qualification Framework (NQF) was established by the South Africa Qualifications Authority Act, 1995. The objectives of the NQF are to:

1. create an integrated national framework for learner achievements;
2. facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
3. enhance the quality of education and training;
4. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination, in education, training and development opportunities; and thereby
5. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

These objectives aim to achieve an integrated approach to education and training based on outcomes that can be assessed for purposes of mobility, portability, progression and for redress through the recognition of prior learning (RPL). The South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) registers all education and training qualifications. For this purpose, over the last five years, a National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) has been established (and by 2004 contained more than 6 million learner achievements). To achieve the objectives of the South African NQF (especially objectives 2 and 4) within the context of South Africa requires an NQF that has robust systems for the RPL and for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT). RPL and a CAT system are seen as crucial instruments for the NQF to be a means of achieving a beneficent transformation of South Africa's education system.

Component 1.1 Demographic change

1.1.a) How have the profiles (age, ethnicity, sex, socio-economic backgrounds) of learners changed/diversified for overall post-secondary education institutions (higher education, further education and vocational education and training, professional training, etc.)? Is there any evidence of admission and graduation rates?

1.1.b) What are the demographic change (ageing population and migration) on participation in different sectors of education and training

1.1.c) Is there any evidence of national policy on migration (e.g. the low-skilled or high skilled) with respect to demographic change?

1.1.d) Describe any change of higher education institutional admission policies starting to practise recognition of non-formal and informal learning due to the demographic change.

Profiles of learners and demographic changes

The Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) Census of 2001 (the most recent census) shows that South Africa has a population of 44.8 million people of whom more than 41% live in rural areas (19 million people) where the levels of poverty and unemployment are high.

South Africa is experiencing rapid urbanisation and most major urban areas are surrounded by a periphery of poor residents living in shack settlements with little or no access to basic services.

As can be seen from Figure 1, 53.7% of the population are 24 years or younger and within this age group there is a slightly higher percentage of females than males. Approximately 31% of the population is of school-going age. There is a decline in numbers in the 0-4 age group. This can be partly explained by falling fertility rates, but may also reflect higher mortality rates amongst young children caused by HIV/AIDS. This decline has been reflected by a similar decline in the number of first-time school enrolments in 2004 and 2005.

Age in five-year categories

Age	Male	Female
85 +	0.1	0.2
80 - 84	0.2	0.3
75 - 79	0.4	0.6
70 - 74	0.5	0.7
65 - 69	0.8	1.1
60 - 64	0.9	1.3
55 - 59	1.2	1.5
50 - 54	1.5	1.7
45 - 49	2.0	2.2
40 - 44	2.6	2.8
35 - 39	3.2	3.4
30 - 34	3.7	4.0
25 - 29	4.1	4.5
20 - 24	4.8	5.1
15 - 19	5.1	5.3
10-14	5.8	5.8
5-9	5.8	5.8
0 - 4	5.5	5.6

% of all people in each age category

■ Male ■ Female
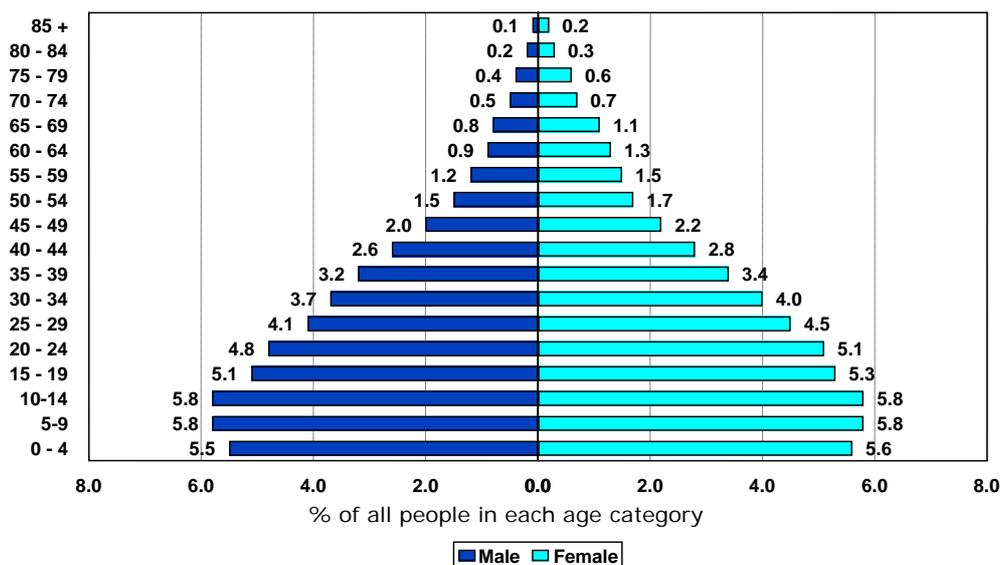
Figure 1: The population distribution by age and sex (Stats SA, 2001)

An important legacy of apartheid lies in the figures for levels of education disaggregated by race as illustrated in *Figure 2* below.

	Black African	Coloured	Asian/Indian	White	Average
■ Higher	5.2	4.9	14.9	29.8	8.4
■ Grade 12 / Std 10	16.8	18.5	34.9	40.9	20.4
□ Some second.	30.4	40.1	33.0	25.9	30.8
□ Completed prim.	6.9	9.8	4.2	0.8	6.4
■ Some prim.	18.5	18.4	7.7	1.2	16.0
■ No schooling	22.3	8.3	5.3	1.4	17.9
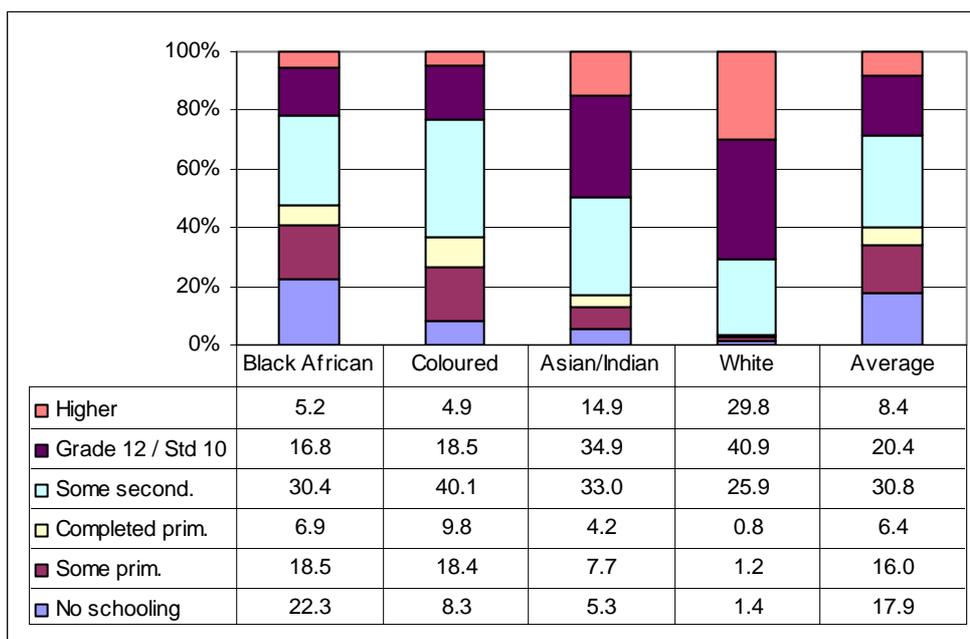
Figure 2: Education by race (Stats SA, 2001)

The following trends manifest themselves with regard to education in the period from 1996 to 2001:

- in the age group 0-19 years a decline of 14.4% of those with no schooling and an increase of 11.9% of those with some primary education;
- the proportion of Africans with no primary education falling from 28% to 13%, and those with some primary education increasing from 42% to 55%;
- the percentage of population with Grade 12 (school-leaving certificate) or higher increasing from 2.4% to 3.1%.

Graduation trends

As noted in the *Trends in public higher education in South Africa 1995-2004* report published by SAQA in March 2007, the number of qualifications that were awarded by South African universities has grown at a steady pace from 1995 to 2004:

	First degree 3 years	National Higher/Post Graduate Diploma	First degree 4 years (including B Tech)	Honours degree	Master's Degree/Diploma	Doctoral Degree/Laureatus Diploma
1995	19418	7976	12115	7921	4353	807
2000	22710	4443	20895	9345	5766	807
2004	23823	7836	23031	14286	7792	999
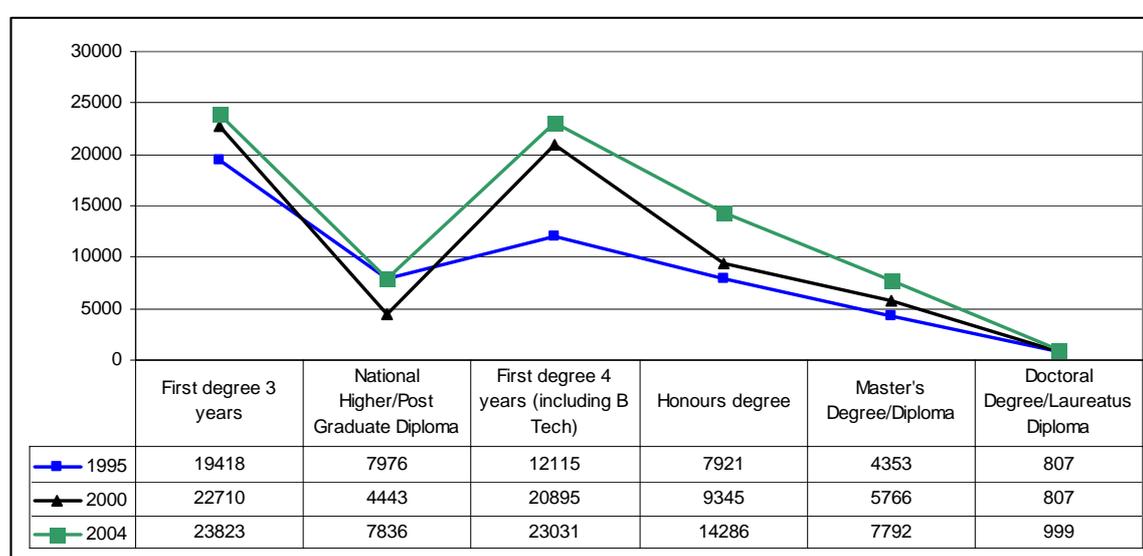
Figure 3: Graduation trends by type of qualification (based on SAQA, 2007)

The following trends in the number of qualifications conferred within a specific academic year, as illustrated in Figure 3, are noted:

- The total number of qualifications awarded per year increased from 67 013 in 1995 to 98 029 in 2004. This constitutes an average annual growth rate of 4.3%.
- Three-year first degrees increased from 19 418 in 1995 to 23 823 in 2004: an average annual increase of 2.3%.
- There was a slight decline in the number of National Higher Diplomas or Post-graduate Diplomas awarded over the period (0.2%).
- The highest growth in qualifications per year occurred in four-year first degrees (7.4%), honours degrees (6.8%) and master's degrees/diplomas (6.7%).

The report also notes that the highest growth (6.7%) in the number of qualifications awarded between 1995 and 2004 occurred at NQF Level 8 (Master's degrees/ diplomas). This was followed by Level 7 qualifications (5.4%). Level 6 qualifications grew by only 3.0% per year, although this growth occurred from a large base (33 841 qualifications in 1995). Qualifications above Level 8 also showed relatively low growth (2.4%).

	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Above Level 8
1995	33841	28012	4353	807
2000	37505	34683	5766	807
2004	44085	45153	7792	999
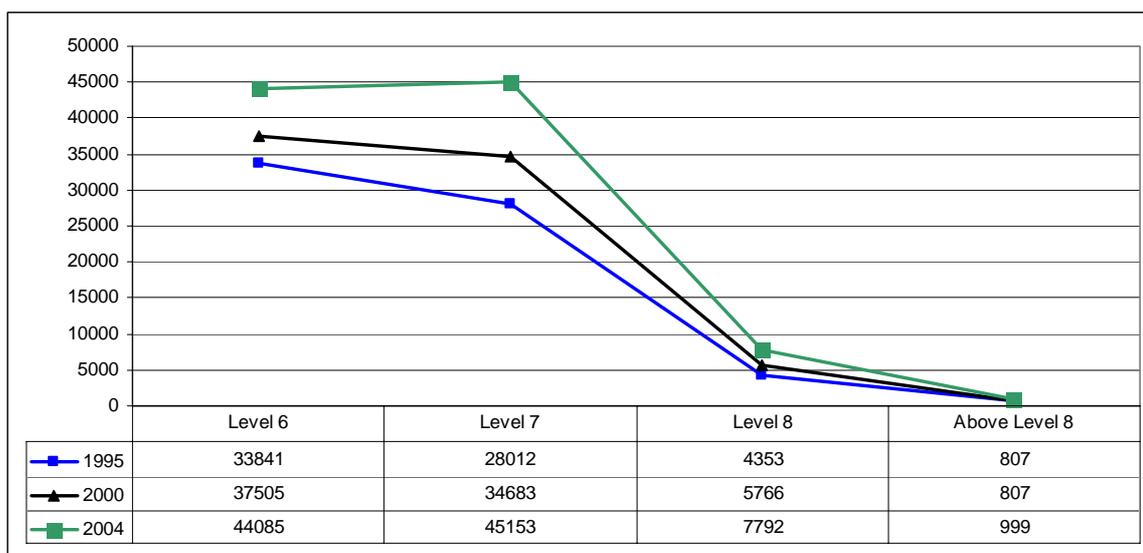
Figure 4: Graduation trends by NQF Level of qualification (based on SAQA, 2007)

The total pool of university graduates under the age of 65 grew by 116.9%, from 542 398 in 1994 to 1 176 496 in 2004. The largest component of the pool of graduates was those with three-year first degrees (286 329 graduates in 2004). The group that showed the highest growth (195.7%) was that of graduates with national diplomas, while the graduates with doctoral degrees or laureatus diplomas grew by only 59.3%.

Type of qualification	1994	2004	Growth %
National Diploma	76 684	226 741	195.70
First degree 3 years	144 835	286 329	97.70
National Higher/Post Graduate Diploma	66 744	114 466	71.50
First degree 4 years (including B Tech)	115 022	264 420	129.90
Honours degree	87 635	177 036	102.00
Master's Degree/Diploma	41 009	90 822	121.50
Doctoral Degree/Laureatus Diploma	10 469	16 682	59.30
Total	**542 398**	**1 176 496**	**116.90**

Table 1: Growth in number of graduates according to type of highest qualification 1994-2004 (from SAQA, 2007)

Migration

A major challenge to improving the material conditions of the poorest is the rate of migration. In the last 10 years, there has been rapid urban migration. In 2002, more than 20% of the population within major metropolitan centres were new migrants, especially in the 20-34 age group as can be seen in Figure 5 below:

Each percentage stands on its own as a percentage of all people in a specific age category. For example, 9, 8% of all children aged 5 - 9 years in October 2001 had moved between the two census periods
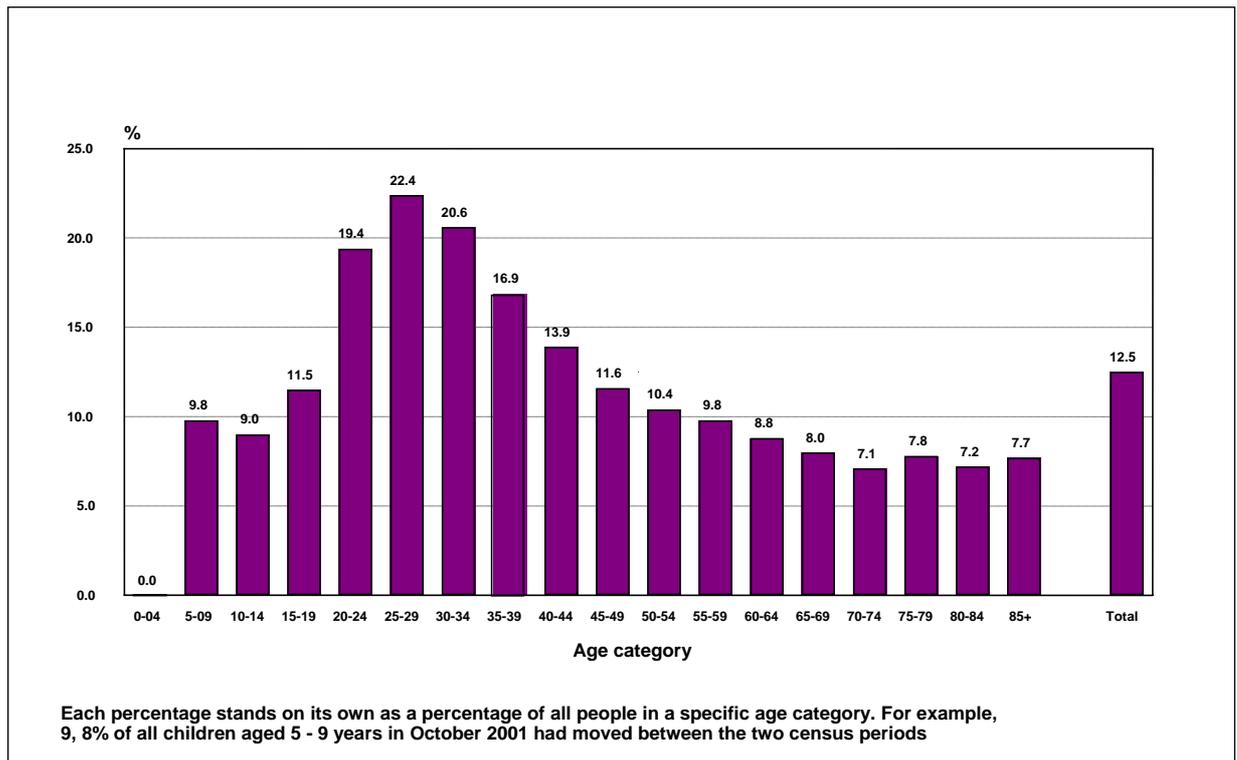
Figure 5: The proportion of people who changed residence at least once between October 1996 and October 2001 by age category (Stats SA, 2001)

The migration data indicates that rural areas are being left with high proportions of female-headed households, older people, young children and increasingly young female adults (15-19) who are mothers. However, given their reliance on pensions and child grants, these households are becoming increasingly dependent and fragile. This phenomenon is being exacerbated by HIV/AIDS increasing the number of orphans and child-headed households. Given the exigencies of rural life with its high demands on labour for survival (fetching water, wood, subsistence farming), less than 10% of people living in rural areas complete formal schooling. The situation is further exacerbated by the lack of opportunities for informal or non-formal learning.

In addition, South African population movements between 1996 and 2001 (DoE, 2006) show that the Gauteng province was the dominant absorber of migrants in the country, followed by the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

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		Destination province (populations in thousands)									
		WC	EC	NC	FS	KZ	NW	GA	MP	LP	Total
Origin	WC	507	28	9	6	9	4	32	3	2	600
	EC	143	408	4	18	63	21	87	11	6	761
	NC	21	3	72	7	2	7	11	1	2	126
	FS	14	9	6	265	8	20	59	7	4	392
	KZ	24	18	2	10	608	8	129	19	7	825
	NW	7	4	18	10	4	251	109	7	12	422
	GA	60	30	7	27	44	52	1 014	35	40	1 309
	MP	6	3	1	6	12	11	89	184	20	332
	LP	6	2	1	4	5	22	170	38	266	514
	Outside SA	21	6	2	12	14	14	77	14	12	172
	Unspecified	19	17	1	10	22	6	45	7	5	132
	Total	828	528	123	375	791	416	1 822	326	376	5 585
In-migrants as a share of 2001 populations (%)		7.1	1.9	6.3	4.0	1.9	4.5	9.1	4.6	2.1	-

Table 2: South African population movements between 1996 and 2001 (thousands) (DoE, 2006)

The main driver of urbanisation is the desire for employment. However, many of the migrants have low levels of education and are unable to secure employment even though South Africa has a large number of vacancies in skilled and semi-skilled occupations. In 2006, the South African government launched the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) to specifically address the skills shortage. RPL is central to the success of this initiative as it provides a means to shorten the length of time required to complete a training programme and become qualified.

National policy on migration

The South African Department of Home Affairs has developed a range of policies to enforce migration controls, including:

- issuance of permanent and temporary residence permits to foreigners who qualify for them
- detection and removal of foreigners who are illegally within the Republic. Incidental to this latter function are the tasks of migration relating to deterring the phenomenon of illegal immigration, investigating its general causes as well as specific cases.

Thirdly, migration must deal with undesirable social phenomena associated with the presence of foreigners in the country, amongst which is the prevention and redress of xenophobia. Additional social problems to be dealt with relate to the cultural adjustment of foreigners and interim services they may require in the process of their relocation.

Changes in admission policies

Empirical data on changes in higher education institutions' admission policies due to demographic change, in particular the practice of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, are very limited at present, but it is highly probable that shifts have taken place. By 2004 at least one public university, the University of South

Africa, had made significant steps towards establishing an RPL Centre, which in turn has impacted on the university's admission requirements:

> In universities, many small projects have been undertaken, often in previously disadvantaged higher education institutions, where a drop in student numbers, due to the de-racialisation of higher education institutions, forced them to find alternative niche markets. Also, universities whose demographic profile is that of the non-traditional learner, such as the University of South Africa (UNISA), have developed and implemented RPL processes (Blom, 2004:56).

According to Blom (2004), a survey undertaken by the Joint Education Services (JET) found that in 2000 RPL implementation in public higher education and training institutions was still very limited. While this survey of 38 institutions is clearly dated, the findings remain important:

- Sixteen institutions did not have any policy or processes in place.
- Twelve had initiated a process, ranging from investigating existing admissions policies to initiating the development of a RPL policy.
- Six institutions had a documented final or draft policy.
- Two were implementing RPL: one in the absence of a documented institutional policy, the other following an institutionally approved policy.

Based on the findings of the survey, the South African technikon sector took this as a clear indication of the need for the development of a policy that would be:

> responsive to the dual demands of reconstruction and development, and the consolidation and expansion of the country's capacity to participate in a global economy that improves the quality of life for all its citizens (Du Pre & Pretorius, 2001 in Blom, 2004:56).

The policy was adopted in 2001 and has been followed by an emphasis on providers' developing RPL implementation plans.

In July 2002, the state of implementation of RPL in the technikon sector was further highlighted at a workshop held in Durban. In a report to a SAQA sub-committee (SAQA, 2002b) the following emerged:

Name of institution	RPL policy	RPL implementation
Technikon Southern Africa (TSA)	Yes	Yes
Peninsula Technikon (Pentech)	Yes	Yes
Cape Technikon (CapeTech)	Yes	Yes, but ad hoc
Pretoria Technikon	Yes	No, development of procedures and access/bridging courses
Port Elizabeth Technikon	Yes	Yes
Free State Technikon	Yes	Yes, part of the Free State Higher education and Training Trust
Durban Institute of Technology	No	No
Technikon Witwatersrand	No	No
Eastern Cape Technikon	Yes	No

Border Technikon	No	No
Mangosuthu Technikon	No	Yes, in the Department of Nature Conservation since 1991
Technikon North-West	No, draft	No
Technikon Northern Gauteng	No, draft	No

Table 3: The state of RPL implementation in the technikon sector, 2002 (SAQA, 2002b)

According to the report many of the difficulties experienced by the technikons in implementing RPL emanated from severe restrictions on staffing and resources.

In March 2003, the technikons were requested to submit implementation plans at a Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) workshop held in Port Elizabeth. These plans had to include details of cost, staffing, proposed timelines, capacity building, proposed pilots in each institution and institution-wide implementation plans. The information was to be used to develop a Strategic Implementation Plan, including a funding strategy. In addition, the CTP commissioned the development of training programmes for RPL assessors and a reference and resource tool (manual) for institutions and practitioners. Also, the CTP RPL policy is explicit on the principles of RPL within this sector. An important principle, which is in keeping with most of the international initiatives, is the need for national quality assurance and benchmarking: all RPL assessments must take place within a quality assurance framework.

In the university sector, the development of RPL implementation plans is much less structured. Generally, universities reflect neither a common understanding of, nor a common approach to RPL within and across institutions. However, Griessel (2001 in Blom, 2004) highlights the elements in the RPL debate and practice, particularly in public universities, as follows:

- RPL as a mechanism to contribute to the achievement of the higher education policy goals of equity and redress, broadened access and increased participation
- the role of RPL in addressing the political imperative of enabling those previously denied access to formal education
- the profile/s of target group/s that will benefit from RPL
- the development of guidelines and frameworks for the implementation of RPL
- the complexities in determining equivalence between different kinds and sites of learning, and consequently different forms of knowledge and competencies.
- the development of appropriate, fit-for-purpose assessment instruments and curriculum responsiveness
- the need for institutional policy decisions about the structural location of RPL initiatives within the institution

These debates are situated within the context of the need for increased participation and the broadening of access to higher education emanating from the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE)(DoE, 2001). The NPHE describes access to higher education as being possible through a number of pathways, namely RPL, entrance testing and bridging, and foundation programmes (academic development). These policy imperatives are emphasised in the NPHE through proposed targets to be achieved.

While the technikon sector seems to be ahead of the university sector in terms of a systemic approach to RPL, the critical issues remain the same (and will increasingly need to be contextualised, particularly in the light of the mergers of higher education

institutions). In a report to the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM), and the Free State Higher and Further Education and Training Trust (FSHFETT), Strydom (2002:17) suggests that the points of departure for access into higher education should be first and foremost a 'client focus', which is to work with learners in a way which is consultative, flexible and responsive to needs. 'Clients' are all learners from the diverse education backgrounds, who are characterised by disadvantage and poor preparation for the demands of higher education. Strydom (2002) suggests that a significant section of these learners will want to enter higher education as working adults with life experience. Furthermore, quality standards, which will provide clear direction in line with minimum thresholds and good practice guidelines stipulated by the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee (HEQC), are essential. Linked to the quality standards is the notion of accountability, which means that institutions must work towards clear purposes (goals/objectives) and defined outcomes within the institutional and national access parameters. Finally, the principle of equity, namely applying justice, fairness and merit to all access procedures, must be maintained. These principles seem to be in keeping with international trends, i.e. those of a learner-centred approach, quality criteria and standards for assessment, and accountability.

All SETAs, in order to be accredited as ETQAs, had to develop and submit RPL policies to the SAQA Directorate: Quality Assurance and Development during their accreditation processes. However, fully-fledged implementation plans and projects have been developed in only a few sectors. The sectors considered for this study include:

- Banking Sector Education and Training Authority (BANKSETA)
- Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA)
- Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority (CHIETA)
- Education and Training Development Practices Training Authority (ETDP SETA)
- Insurance Education and Training Authority (INSETA)
- Mechanical and Engineering Manufacturing and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MERSETA)
- Services Education and Training Authority (SSETA).

Common to all these developments is the acknowledgement of the responsibility of the ETQAs to ensure that RPL is implemented in a credible and accountable manner. Thus, the point of departure for all these initiatives is one of quality assurance, both in terms of the technical requirements for assessment of prior learning, and in terms of assessment practices and methodologies. RPL policy development is closely aligned with the SAQA RPL policy and it is foreseen that the ETQAs will use the quality criteria established in the SAQA policy as a guideline for monitoring and auditing of RPL. Ultimately, the ETQAs will have the responsibility of awarding credits based on internal and external moderation processes undertaken to ensure the integrity of the processes.

In most of the sectors mentioned above, procedures and guidelines have been developed and are being tested in a range of projects.

The SETAs' initiatives are closely linked to workforce development projects. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) as a key stakeholder in labour-related issues, including the opening up of access to education and training, spearheaded pilot projects in RPL in the nineties. Two pilot projects, one in the mining sector and one in the motor industries sector, highlighted the critical need for a common purpose and understanding of RPL between workers and management within a particular environment (Ballim, Omar & Ralphs, in Evans, 2000). Also, the impact that RPL may have on the development of 'fit-for-purpose' curricula became evident. Ballim (et al, in Evans, 2000) suggests that "[w]hat has become clear is

that RPL cannot be separated from broader epistemological, political and ethical issues" (p. 189).

This notion is reflected in the SAQA RPL policy (SAQA, 2002a) as the 'holistic' approach whereby "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" (p.11).

This is the real challenge for RPL in South Africa. The best international practices generally do not speak to these uniquely South African needs to redress past educational injustices, where an openness exists to the seeking and crediting of equivalence of learning in relation to qualifications, rather than an attempt to match learning exactly with current curricula on offer in institutions in South Africa.

A picture of what a valid and accountable system of RPL might look like, based on commonalities of approaches internationally, seems to be emerging.

Component 1.2 Internationalisation

1.2.a) Describe any national policy or current practices of recognition of non-formal and informal learning as part of integration strategies of migrant population (highly skilled, low skilled and refugees)?

1.2.b) Describe any national policies or higher education institutional approaches that are currently being taken to promote comparability/compatibility, visibility and portability of learning outcomes through non-formal and informal learning to promote cross-border mobility.

According to the 2001 Census, 463 002 South African residents are citizens of other countries (approximately 1% of the total population). Of these:
- 69% are from the other SADC countries
- 19% are from Europe
- 5.4% are from the rest of Africa
- 3.5% are from Asia.

Under the aegis of SAQA, the Centre for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications (CEEQ) compares and evaluates formal qualifications. However, there is as yet no system in place for evaluating informal or non-formal learning of migrants. Since 2001, the number of migrants entering South Africa has increased dramatically – especially from Zimbabwe.

The following is a selection of empirical data from a pilot dataset managed by CEEQ for the period June to October 2006 (see Keevy & Coetzee, 2006). The data is included for illustrative purposes only and includes only a portion of the total number of applications registered for the period. Despite these obvious current limitations, the selection does show the potential contribution that the data could make once the system has been fully developed. It also highlights a number of trends (although tentative) in the purposes for which qualifications are submitted, the types of qualifications evaluated, the countries from which the applications are received and the fields in which the applications occur.

Purpose of application

While recognising that the different categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive (i.e. an application can fall into more than one category), it is evident that the majority of applicants from the pilot dataset submitted applications for the evaluation of their qualifications for employment purposes (409 or 32%). Included in the pilot

dataset is a significant number of applications for professional purposes (179 or 14%). Applications for further study (388 or 31%) were also high, while applications for permanent residence (101 or 8%) and the general categories of 'Use in foreign country' (50 or 4%) and others made up the balance. An important aspect that requires further exploration is an analysis of the South African qualifications being evaluated for 'Use in a foreign country'.

	Employment	Permanent residence	Professional registration	Further study	Use in foreign country	Other	Total
Number of applications	409	101	179	388	50	143	1270
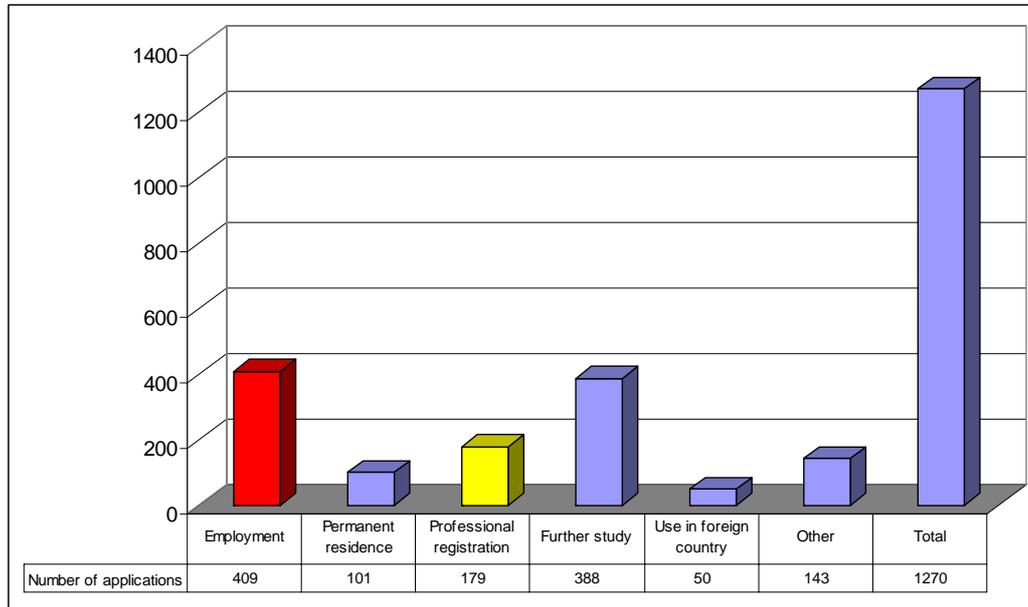
Figure 6: Purpose of application

An important yet tentative observation (based on the fact that this is only a pilot dataset), and one that is also in line with the Commonwealth (see SAQA, 2006) and the United Nations (2006), is that many of the applications fall into the highly skilled professional grouping. If we make the assumption that applications for professional registration are also mostly for employment purposes, almost half (44%) of the applications for employment were for jobs that require some form of professional registration, i.e. the highly skilled. While this observation will have to be verified once the piloting stage has been completed, it does signal that the migration trend in South Africa, with or without active foreign recruitment, is following the worldwide trend towards the highly skilled. If South Africa is in dire need of critical skills in areas other than the highly skilled, it seems that the current migration flow will be problematic. We return to this point in the final section on importing critical skills.

Qualification types

Number of applications	Academic (schooling)	Vocational	Academic (university)	Career-orientated	Professional	Total
	200	29	407	95	98	829
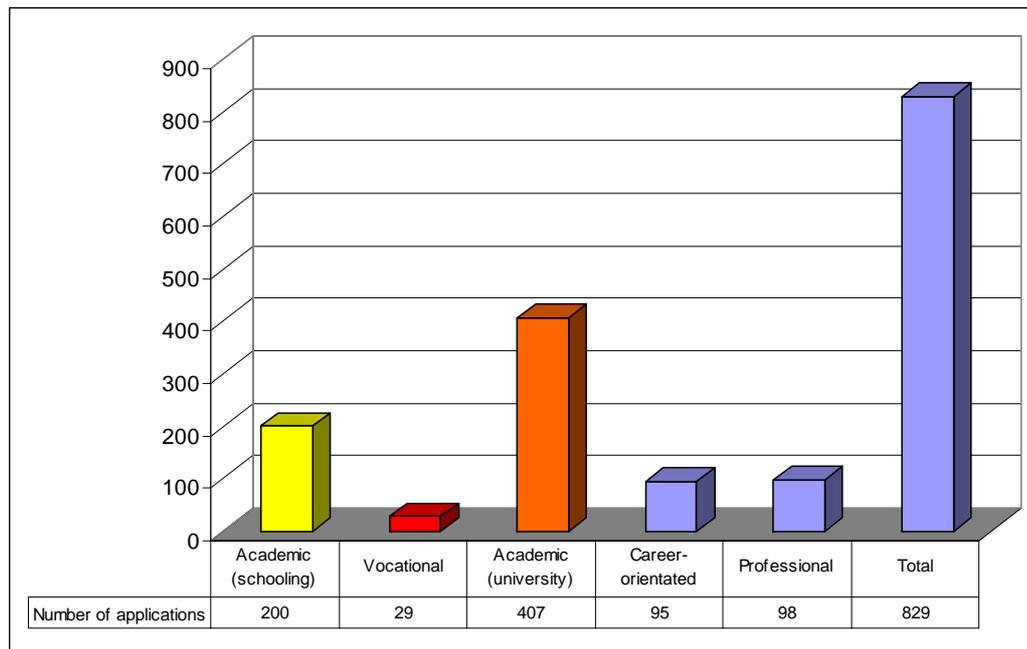
Figure 7: Qualification types

Keeping in mind again that the different categories presented are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and related to the observations made from the first graph on the purpose of application for the evaluation of foreign qualifications, the second graph confirms that, of the qualifications submitted for evaluation, nearly half are of an academic/university type (407 or 49%) and nearly one quarter (200 or 24%) are from the schooling sector. A further 98 (or 12%) are of a professional type. The more worrying observation is that very few of the qualifications submitted for evaluation or from the vocational sector (only 29 or 4%) are career-orientated (95 or 12%).

Qualifications by Organising Fields

The categorisation of the applications in the pilot dataset according to the 12 Organising Fields used in the NQF also makes for some interesting reading, most notably in the context of the call for foreign recruitment of critical skills. Most applications are being received in Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology (144 or 19%), Business, Commerce and Management Studies (96 or 13%) and Physics, Mathematics, Computer and Health Sciences (77 or 10%). Organising Fields with the fewest applications are Services (7 or 1%), Culture and Art (9 or 1,2%), Communication Studies and Languages (13 or 1.8%) and Agriculture and Nature Conservation (15 or 2%).

Qualifications by country of origin

By far the greatest number of applicants originate from Zimbabwe – of the 841 applications included in this sample, 260 (or 31%) came from Zimbabwe. Other

countries with high numbers of applications include Nigeria (89 or 11%), Lesotho (58 or 7%), Democratic Republic of the Congo (58 or 7%) and India[1] (42 or 5%).

SADC Member States, including some mentioned above, contributed to the vast majority of applications (countries without applications have been excluded from the list), totalling 458 (or 55%) of the dataset:

- Botswana (10 or 1.2%)
- Democratic Republic of Congo (58 or 7%)
- Lesotho (58 or 7%)
- Malawi (7 or 0.8%)
- Mauritius (3 or 0.4%)
- Mozambique (1 or 0.1%)
- Namibia (12 or 1.4%)
- Swaziland (21 or 2.5%)
- Tanzania (1 or 0.1%)
- Zambia (27 or 3.2%)
- Zimbabwe (260 or 31%)

Only 2 (or 0.2%) applications were received from Australasia, while 56 (or 7%) were received from Europe.

Component 1.3 ICT

1.3.a) Provide any evidence of modularisation of learning and the new recording system opened up by new information and communication technologies be fully used to promote credit transfer.

1.3.b) Provide a list of new qualifications that have been opened up by new information and communication technologies. Provide evidence, if any, that the certificates by the major industries carry more or equivalent currency in the labour market than academic qualifications.

1.3.c) Describe current national policies or practices of e-portfolio as a tool to record learning outcomes or 'learning assets'. What has been achieved and what are the challenges?

All nationally recognised qualifications are registered on the NQF and managed through the NLRD, the management information system for the NQF. Two types of qualifications are registered: unit standard-based qualifications and non-unit standard-based qualifications. The first type is mostly associated with occupationally directed qualifications and has been developed in conjunction with particular economic and industrial sectors and is offered by industry-based training institutions. While unit standard-based qualifications are registered as a whole qualification, the unit standards can also 'stand alone', i.e. short learning programmes can be developed to encompass the learning outcomes for a particular unit of learning that also makes up a part of a larger learning programme leading to a qualification. The rationale is that credits can be awarded and recorded on the NQF in relation to these 'standalone' unit standards, which could facilitate credit accumulation over time. Thus, theoretically, credits attained through RPL could be recognised towards full qualifications (see discussion on the CETA case study in section 5).

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[1] The applicants from India include a number of individuals who have not completed secondary schooling.

The second type of qualification – non-unit standard-based qualifications - includes traditional discipline-based qualifications offered at public and private institutions. Most of these qualifications, particularly in higher education, are modularised. However, 'modules' or 'subjects' are not registered on the NQF in the same way in which unit standards are registered. Modules and subjects are usually transferable between public institutions through inter-institutional agreements.

These two types of qualification have been the subject of much debate in South Africa but, according to *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System: Consultative Document* (DoE & DoL, 2003:21),

> the debate over unit standards-based qualifications and whole [non-unit standard based] qualifications should now be laid to rest. Attention should focus on the complex process of establishing a functional credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) scheme, without which the NQF objective of facilitating "access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths" will be indefinitely delayed.

Nevertheless, articulation between the two types of qualifications (unit standards based and non-unit standards based qualifications) is difficult. While it is acknowledged that the reduction of unnecessary differences between the types of qualifications will aid articulation and credit transfer, explicit systemic work still needs to take place in order to achieve this ideal. It is largely dependent on the design of qualifications and the extent to which a unit-standard model is retained for the different types of qualification and the agreements between different stakeholders across the full spectrum of the education and training system. Thus, while the recording system for learner achievements, as managed through the NLRD, could enable credit transfer, it has not taken place to any great extent (see discussion of Credit Accumulation and Transfer).

Component 1.4 Economic developments and skills shortage/mismatch

1.4.a) Describe any legal framework, policy, programmes, research that address the issue of recognition of skills, experience and knowledge within the framework of human capital with respect to the economic developments or labour force issues. Are there any specific policies at the regional level concerning such as 'Regional Development' and 'Learning Regions'?

1.4.b) Describe overall skills mismatch/shortage situation in your country. Do you have any economic policies that address the issue of skills shortage or skills mismatch? In what sectors/industries has the issue been most conspicuous?

1.4.c) Provide any evidence of increasing or decreasing economic and social disparities in your country (e.g. poverty rate such as Gini-co-efficiency) among certain groups (low skilled, immigrants, youth, older workers, etc.). Provide also, if any, relevant documents addressing policies issues (economic, social, labour market, etc.) that account for such trends.

1.4.d) Provide data, if any, which points to the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as a way of re-distributing human capital and solve the issue of skills mismatch and skills shortage and, therefore, a way to drive economic development.

1.4.e) Provide data, if any, if there has been any study that points to a certain group that would benefit most from the recognition system for their skills (e.g. retirees, older workers, women, immigrants (highly- skilled or low-skilled), part-time workers, unemployed youth, etc.)?

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has risen from ZAR 460 billion (where one billion equals a thousand million) in 1980 to ZAR 661 billion in 2002 (approximately EUR 69 billion at current exchange rates). On average, the economy has grown at a rate of 2.8% during the last decade. The budget deficit has come down from 9.5% of GDP in 1993 to fractionally over 1% in 2003. Over the last five years, South Africa has achieved a high level of macro economic stability – levels not seen in South Africa for more than 40 years. This has created the capacity within the state to direct significant levels of expenditure to improve material and social conditions and confront poverty and exclusions created by apartheid.

In 1990, South Africa's Gini coefficient was 0.68; by 2000 it had declined to 0.59. This latter figure declines further to 0.35 when including social transfers. Reading between the lines, these figures show that levels of inequality in South Africa remain high, although the sharp divisions are no longer solely along race lines. The black middle stratum is now larger than its white counterpart. However, the vast majority of the poor are still African and live primarily in rural areas or in peri-urban areas (where they are usually new migrants). The figures also show that social transfers (social grants, public works expenditure) are improving the material conditions of the poorest South Africans.

Social grants	1994	2003
Expenditure	R10b	R34.8b
Beneficiaries	2.6m	6.8m

Table 4: Social grants (PCAS, 2003)

Another key indicator of social transfers is in the provision of basic services:

Basic service	% of poor households		% of non-poor households	
	1995	2000	1995	2000
Public electricity	34.9	58.4	79.8	85.6
Piped water	59.3	77.2	88.7	94.0
Sanitation facility	74.6	71.7	93.7	91.3
Telecommunication	5.9	16.1	41.8	52.2
Formal house with public electricity, piped water and sanitation facility	22.1	35.4	71.4	70.3

Table 5: Changes in access to basic services by poverty group (PCAS, 2003)

Although the increase in access to basic services for poor households has been significant, there is still a long way to go – especially given that poor households tend to be larger households.

The economically active population has grown from 11 466 653 in 1995 to 15 429 120 in 2002. Between 1995 and 2002, the number of people employed in South Africa grew from 9 557 185 to 11 157 818. This represents 1 600 633 new jobs. However, during the same period, the number of unemployed people grew from 1 909 468 to 4 271 301. This represents an increase of 2 361 834 and a rate of unemployment of approximately 36%. Of those employed about 12.5% were temporary workers and 6.4% were casual workers.

There is high unemployment amongst unskilled workers and young workers (20-30 age group) and a shortage of semi-skilled and high-skilled workers. In September 2002, the unemployment rate for under-30s was 49% compared to 21% for those aged over 30.

Unemployment rates are also higher for women than for men:

Population group	Rate of unemployment by gender	
	Male	Female
African	30.4%	37.4%
Coloured	20.3%	22.9%
Indian/Asian	15.7%	18.7%
White	4.4%	6.2%

Table 6: Unemployment rate by population group and gender (Stats SA, 2004)

There has been an increased intake of women in the service sectors and women have increased their share of overall employment between 1995 and 1999 in six of the occupational categories (Gelb, 2003:11). There are also indications that women are starting to earn more in some sectors, particularly the semi-skilled category; and according to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2004) this may reflect a growing demand for women in the service sectors. However, in other areas, women still earn less than males. Table 7 provides an overview of employment by occupational category, race and gender.

The recognition of non-formal and informal learning in South Africa

Category	Year	African			Coloured			Indian or Asian			White			Total		
		M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Legislators, senior officials and managers	1996	2.0	1.2	1.7	3.2	2.1	2.7	9.2	4.5	7.5	14.1	7.1	11.1	4.8	2.8	4.0
	2001	2.7	1.7	2.3	4.1	2.8	3.5	14.5	7.2	11.7	19.4	10.3	15.4	6.5	3.8	5.4
Professionals	1996	4.9	11.8	7.5	4.5	9.4	6.6	9.7	14.8	11.5	15.3	19.3	17.1	7.1	13.3	9.6
	2001	3.7	4.3	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.9	11.7	12.8	12.1	18.5	16.8	17.8	6.9	7.1	7.0
Technicians and associate professionals	1996	2.6	3.9	3.1	4.3	5.7	4.9	9.8	10.4	10.0	12.8	16.4	14.4	5.1	7.2	6.0
	2001	5.6	11.4	8.0	6.5	10.7	8.4	11.1	14.2	12.3	13.0	18.0	15.2	7.3	12.8	9.6
Clerks	1996	3.3	6.1	4.4	5.4	14.2	9.3	9.2	24.9	14.8	4.6	30.9	15.9	4.0	13.4	7.8
	2001	6.2	10.3	7.8	7.9	19.3	13.1	14.4	32.0	21.1	6.3	31.8	17.5	6.8	16.7	10.9
Service, shop and market sales workers	1996	10.2	7.2	9.0	7.6	9.0	8.2	10.3	8.9	9.8	9.7	8.6	9.2	9.8	7.8	9.0
	2001	11.7	8.3	10.3	8.3	8.9	8.6	13.4	10.2	12.2	11.3	9.2	10.4	11.3	8.6	10.2
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	1996	5.9	2.7	4.7	4.6	1.3	3.1	0.6	0.3	0.5	4.2	0.8	2.7	5.2	2.0	3.9
	2001	3.8	2.1	3.1	3.4	1.4	2.5	0.5	0.1	0.4	3.6	0.9	2.4	3.6	1.7	2.8
Craft and related trades workers	1996	22.1	5.4	15.7	21.4	5.0	14.2	15.5	4.9	11.7	16.9	2.0	10.5	20.7	4.6	14.3
	2001	18.9	4.9	13.2	19.2	5.6	13.0	13.3	5.2	10.3	13.8	1.5	8.4	17.8	4.3	12.2
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	1996	15.4	2.1	10.3	9.8	7.5	8.8	9.6	10.0	9.8	4.3	0.8	2.8	12.3	2.9	8.5
	2001	16.7	2.7	11.0	10.3	5.4	8.1	9.4	6.5	8.3	3.4	0.5	2.1	13.1	2.7	8.8
Elementary occupations	1996	22.4	52.1	33.8	29.3	37.6	33.0	5.3	5.0	5.2	3.3	2.5	2.9	18.7	37.3	26.1
	2001	24.7	47.7	34.0	29.3	35.0	31.0	5.6	4.9	5.3	3.1	2.4	2.8	20.4	35.1	26.5
Undetermined/Other	1996	11.2	7.3	9.7	9.9	8.2	9.2	20.9	16.3	19.2	14.8	11.5	13.4	12.2	8.7	10.9
	2001	5.9	6.7	6.2	6.9	6.8	6.9	5.9	6.8	6.3	7.6	8.6	8.0	6.4	7.1	6.7

Table 7: Proportions of employees by occupational category, race and gender (Stats SA, 2002b)

While the data requires a more rigorous interrogation, the following major trends seem to emerge:

- The proportion of those employed in skilled categories has increased from about 40% in 1996 to 46% in 2001.
- There is a reduction in craft and related trades – reflecting in part the restructuring of the economy, but also a weakness in the training of artisans – and this trend is more pronounced among Africans.
- There has been a slight increase in the proportion of Africans in the category of legislators, senior officials and managers, from 1.7% in 1996 to 2.3% in 2001; and given the massive increase in the legislators category, the trend in the other categories should be dismal.
- By far the most significant proportion of African employees remains in elementary occupations, with a disproportionately large percentage of women.

Of particular concern given the shortage of skills is the reduction in craft and related trades. One legacy of apartheid lies in the figures for levels of education disaggregated by race. Other factors, such as the improvement in the Senior Certificate examinations (school-leaving certificate) pass rate, the reduction in the pupil/teacher ratios, the building of classrooms and schools, upgrading the qualifications of teachers, the provision of basic services, the national schools nutrition programme and the supply of learning support materials all point to improvements in quality. Of especial importance have been changes in funding formulas that benefit the poorest schools. However, these improvements are unevenly dispersed and many rural and farm schools have experienced little improvement in their quality of education over the last decade. One constant challenge is the inability of the poor to access their basic rights. For example, fee exemptions are available but there is little take-up of these by the poor. In response to this, from 2006 all schools in the poorest two quintiles will not charge school fees.

Further, research shows that 51% of black matriculants are still looking for a job compared to 14% of whites, 30% of coloured and 28% of indians. In 2002, the unemployment rate for those under 30 years of age with diplomas was 35%, up from 10% in 1995 (HSRC, 2004).

Trends in access to education show an appreciable increase in access by females:

Category	Males %		Females %		Total %	
Year	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
No schooling	**28.00**	**12.53**	**25.35**	**11.93**	**26.67**	**12.23**
Some Primary	42.89	55.79	40.65	51.65	41.76	53.71
Complete Primary	7.35	7.82	7.97	8.11	7.66	7.96
Some Secondary	19.68	21.25	23.36	24.77	21.53	23.02
Std 10/ Grade 12	2.01	2.39	2.57	3.25	2.3	2.83
Higher	0.07	0.21	0.1	0.28	0.09	0.25

Table 8: Education by gender (DoE, 2006)

Component 1.5 Others

1.5.a) Provide other contextual factors or trends that you think are influential – directly or non-directly – that drive changes of institutional and technical arrangements and stakeholder behaviour concerning recognition of non-formal and informal learning which have not been addressed in Component 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, and 1.5.

1.5.b) Provide historical background concerning recognition of non-formal and informal learning in your country.

A range of other contextual factors related to institutional changes concerning non-formal and informal learning are discussed below:

	15-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-64 yrs	15-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-64 yrs	15-24 yrs	25-34 yrs	35-64 yrs
		1999			2001			2003	
All	3.3	6.4	17.9	2.0	4.2	14.5	2.2	4.4	16.0
African	3.4	7.4	22.7	2.3	5.0	19.3	2.4	5.0	20.2
Coloured	3.7	5.3	13.0	1.5	3.3	9.6	1.8	4.2	11.0
Asian	3.7	3.6	6.7	1.5	1.9	1.6	1.8	0.3	3.0
White	1.4	0.9	1.4	0.5	0.1	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.1
Male	3.4	6.1	14.9	2.3	3.9	11.9	2.6	4.3	13.6
Female	3.4	6.6	20.6	2.3	4.6	16.9	2.6	4.5	17.9
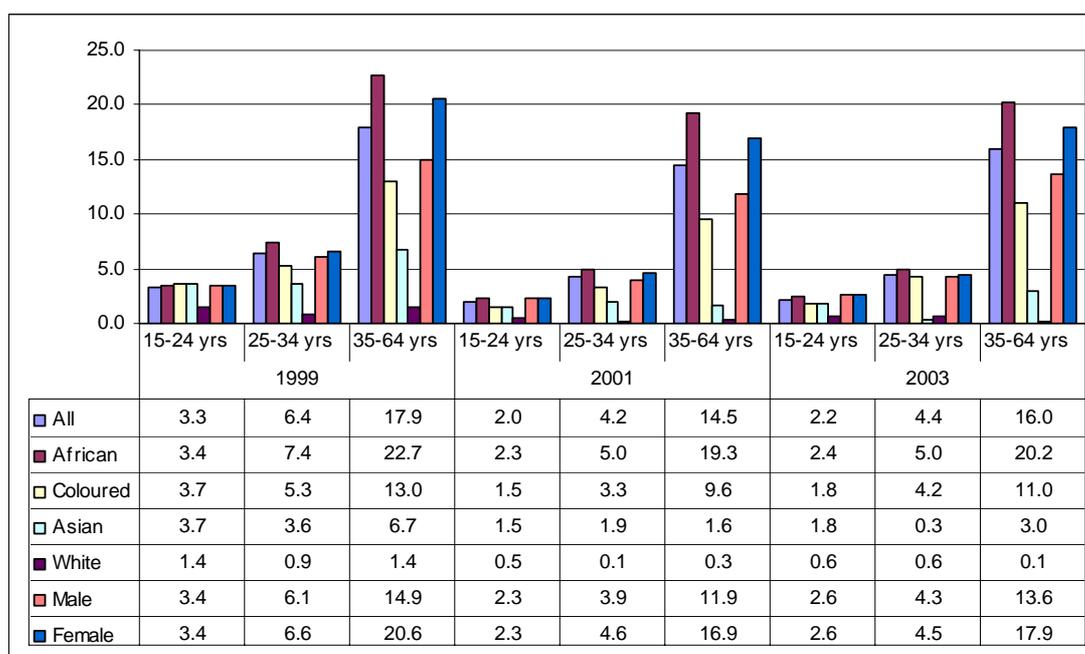
Figure 8: Adult illiteracy rates by race and gender 1999-2003 (DoE, 2006)

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As reflected in Figure 8 (DoE, 2006:30) adult illiteracy rates in South Africa over the period 1999 to 2003 show the following trends:

- The proportion of individuals with no formal education aligns relatively well with the proportion of individuals who are illiterate (unable to read or write in any language).
- Fewer than 9% of adults between the ages of 15-64 years were illiterate.
- Around 9.5% of females were illiterate, compared to 7.5% of males across the three age groups, with the gap most pronounced amongst 35-64 year-olds.

There were 33 484 established public institutions and registered independent institutions in South Africa in 2002, including 27 647 ordinary schools and 5 837 other education institutions, including ABET centres, ELSN (learners with special educational needs) schools and ECD sites, Public FET and HET institutions. The 27 647 ordinary schools were made up as follows:

- 17 197 primary schools, with 6 378 178 learners and 179 222 educators;
- 5 752 secondary schools, with 3 514 162 learners and 113 171 educators; and
- 4 698 combined, intermediate and middle schools, with 2 024 677 learners and 63 337 educators.

Of the 13 531,690 learners in all sectors of the education system in 2002, 11 638 356 (86%) were in public schools and 278 661 (2.1%) were in independent schools. 530 615 (3.9%) were in ABET centres, ELSN special schools and ECD sites. 677 913 (5.0%) were in public higher education institutions and 406 145 (3.0%) were in public FET institutions. Of the 355 730 educators, 230 549 are female. The national average learner-to-educator ratio in public schools was 33:1. The national average learner-to-school ratio 431:1.

In 2002, the national overall pass rate in the Senior Certificate examination was 68.9%; 305 774 candidates passed of whom 75 048 (16.9%) achieved an endorsement for entry to higher education.

South Africa has high enrolment rates as a percentage of the school-age cohort. The primary school enrolment of over 100% reflects children being sent to school before reaching school-going age, and the high repetition rates in the lower grades. Although these figures reflect hard-won achievements, female students in rural areas still remain far more vulnerable to sexual harassment, violence and household labour than their urban counterparts. And, probably as a consequence of HIV/AIDS, there are increasing numbers of young females (10-15 years) heading up rural households and of orphans.

	Male	Female	Total
☐ No money for fees	80.4	54.6	64.5
■ Pregnancy	0.4	29.6	18.4
☐ Family commitment	6.2	6.6	6.4
☐ Illness	5.7	4.5	5.0
■ Institution is too far away	4.6	3.0	3.6
☐ Other & unspecified	2.6	1.7	2.1
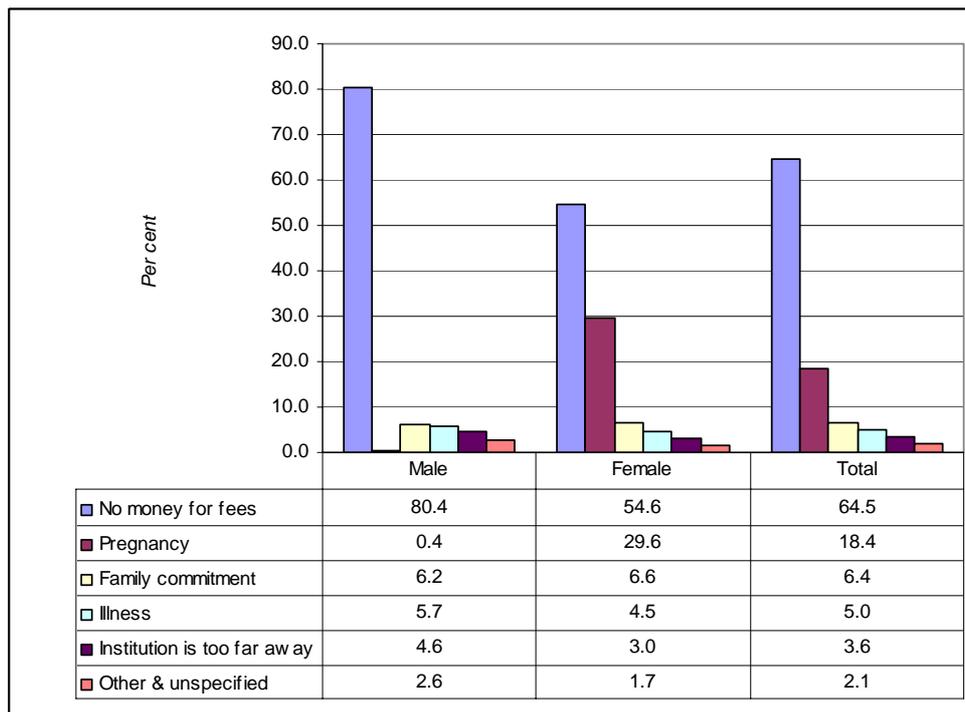
Figure 9: Reasons for not continuing education, non-matriculated 15-18 year-olds, 1995 (DoE, 2006)

The reasons preventing more than 45 000 15-18-year-olds who had not completed matric and were not attending school, from continuing their education in 1995 included:

- mainly financial constraints (nearly two-thirds)
- pregnancy (nearly three in 10 females)
- family commitment, illness and distance

South Africa has a fairly well-developed school-based further education sector (covering the last three years of schooling leading to a National Senior Certificate) and a growing public and private FET College system. Following a merger of public FET technical schools in 2003 and 2004, the number of institutions has been reduced from 152 technical schools to 50 large multi-sited institutions. In addition, there are over 800 private FET providers offering, in the main, specialised skills-focused programmes.

South Africa has a well-developed higher education sector. In 2001, the National Plan for Higher Education was approved by government. This has resulted in radical changes to the higher education landscape with a reduction in public higher education institutions from 35 to 24. Prior to 2001, there were 21 universities and 14 universities of technology. However, many of these had been established by the apartheid regime on specifically ethnic and linguistic grounds. To redress these legacies, the government has merged institutions creating 11 universities, five technikons, six comprehensive institutions and two National Institutes for Higher Education. A comprehensive regulatory system has been put in place, with public institutions regulated by three-year rolling plans (including approved programmes) and a carefully configured funding formula that rewards institutions that have high throughput rates and higher percentages of graduates in Science, Engineering and Technology. Postgraduate and research outputs are also rewarded highly. These 'steering' mechanisms are intended to improve the

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quality of a system that varies from excellence (with four universities in the world's top 500) to poor.

Institution type	Enrolments
Universities	
Contact	256 938
Distance	206 087
Total	463 025
Technikons/ Universities of Technology	
Contact	153 815
Distance	61 073
Total	214 888
Grand Total	**677 914**

Table 9: Enrolments in Higher Education for 2002 (DoE, 2002)

Of total enrolments in higher education, 54.5% are female. The throughput rate for graduates and post-graduates is less than 15% a year. The distribution between clusters of subjects is:

Science, Engineering and Technology   26%
Business   30 %
Humanities   44%

A nationwide audit in 2000 showed that 1 million learners were participating in ECD programmes (of those 8 million children aged 0-6 years). The majority of provision is privately funded.

Expenditure on ABET for the period 2000 to 2003 averaged approximately ZAR 500 million a year (approximately EUR 52 million) catering for 530 615 adult learners per annum. The overall adult literacy rate for 2001 was 89% and for the 15-24 age group was 96%. However, these figures are partially misleading as the threshold for literacy used in these calculations is six years of schooling. In many cases, particularly amongst the older population, the literacy effects of schooling wore off a long time ago and the functionally literate rate overall for those 15 years of age and above is probably closer to 80%.

A recent comprehensive study carried out under the auspices of the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) provides some interesting glimpses of South African teachers:

- 27% had a housing subsidy
- 70% had been teaching for 10 years or longer
- 68% were members of a medical aid fund
- 89% were members of a trade union
- 12.7% of the sample are HIV-positive
- Over 80% are fully qualified

The highest HIV prevalence amongst educators is in the 25-34 years age group that makes up 21.4% of the teaching corps. The next highest grouping is those aged 35-44 (12.8% of the teaching corps). HIV prevalence was the same for male and female educators. Educators residing in rural areas and those working in rural schools had higher HIV prevalence rates than those educators residing and teaching in urban areas.

Although the attrition rate of teachers has remained constant over the last decade at approximately 5%, there are concerns that not enough new teachers are being trained. Currently, gaps are being filled by the pool of unemployed teachers that were a result of the colleges of education training too many teachers. However, this pool is disappearing.

Some of the specific challenges to improving material and social conditions and strengthening social cohesion identified in *Towards a Ten Year Review* (PCAS, 2003) are:

Demographic shifts

- majority of population under 25 years of age
- high proportion of 20-50 age group in urban areas
- rural areas have a high proportion of young and old
- increases in single and female-headed households
- increasing complexity of social planning (education, health, security)
- increase in numbers of economically active population especially young adults
- increase in number of income grant beneficiaries

Rapid and continuing migration

- leading to a concentration of the economically active population in urban areas (hence less economic 'capacity' in rural areas)
- increasing number of urban poor (with low levels of education)
- pressure on urban infrastructure in the preferred areas of migration (Gauteng and the other Metros)
- increasing complexity of infrastructural planning

Fracturing of families

- increase in single and extended households (that are increasingly not based on kin relationships)
- decline in nuclear families
- increase in single and child-headed households

Weak national consciousness/value orientation

- South Africa is a highly diverse society with multiple identities
- while race, ethnic and language identities are receding, class identity is rising
- although a majority of young people identify themselves as African or South African this is primarily in respect to a geographic and state identity
- tension between a western-oriented cosmopolitanism and African-oriented local identities and cultures
- weak entrepreneurial culture

The brief summative picture provided above indicates strongly the urgent need for an education and training system that can facilitate access to education and training opportunities for those previously excluded by apartheid. To do this in a way that acknowledges South Africa's constitutional commitments to equity and redress requires an NQF that promotes access through RPL and enables progression, portability and mobility through a CAT system.

Component 2: Description of institutional arrangements

Component 2.1 Political and legal framework

2.1.a) Describe, if any, clear political will or statements and policy responses in your country on lifelong learning which are explicitly linked to recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

2.1.b) Do you have legal regulatory frameworks concerning recognition of non-formal and informal learning? Please state – yes, under development/discussion, or no. For those who answered 'No', describe possible reasons for the inexistence as well as possible future prospects. For those who answered 'yes' or 'under development/discussion', please answer to the following questions.

2.1.c) Describe the aim(s) and principles stated in the framework?

2.1.d) Describe the historical background that this issue has been taken up. What are the most important drivers of legislation? If there has been already reform of the legislation, describe the change and the pressure which made the change.

2.1.e) What areas of competencies do governments have or intend to have? Are there any specific areas that are/ to be regulated by law or by social partners for professional recognition?

2.1.f) Describe, if any, operational systems to put the legal framework into practice. Who set up the system(s)?

2.1.g) Provide information, if exists, any evaluation of how they work or how they have not worked.

2.1.h) Describe outreach activities or awareness-raising activities of the framework or the operational systems. How are the objectives of outreach/awareness-raising activities articulated? Which audience(s) do the activities mainly target?

Looking back over the 1990s, it is possible to see three distinct phases and the emergence of a fourth in the transformation of the South African education and training system. These distinct phases, discernible at a macro level, framed changes in the education system. The first phase, from 1990 to 1994, was a period of structural stasis and cultural malaise. Apartheid legislation and structures persisted with their myriad separate departments, curricula and institutions, albeit with a creeping deterioration. The legitimacy, authority, efficiency and effectiveness of the apartheid system were in tatters from the struggles of the 1980s but as yet no new bearers of the necessary roles and responsibilities required by an education system had emerged. While the old state marked time, education policy development flourished as attempts were made to construct an inspirational and viable vision of post-apartheid South Africa's education and training system.

The second phase, from 1994 to 1996, saw the manifestation of policy in the emergence of new structures, role players and authoritative bodies able to establish commissions and task teams with a legislative authority grounded in the interim Constitution. In 1994, the newly elected government began the task of implementing the interim Constitution by creating one national and nine

provincial education departments and a number of statutory and non-statutory councils: ELRC, SAQA, South African Council for Educators (SACE), National Skills Authority (NSA) and SETAs.

The first major new education legislation, in 1995, established SAQA and the NQF. This was followed, in 1996 and 1997, by a number of policy documents and new laws (National Education Policy Act, South African Schools Act) and by a variety of transformation programmes guided by the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

The National Education Policy Act, with its principles and frameworks, and the South African Schools Act, with its reorganisation of the schooling system, set clear strategic objectives and determined roles and responsibilities for the national and provincial departments, school governing bodies and other stakeholders. There was a steady reconstruction of state structures as new bodies such as the Heads of Education Committee (HEDCOM), the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), and the nine provincial departments emerged. In spite of all this activity on the policy and structural fronts during this second phase, there was, at the level of schools and classrooms and in trade and occupational training, little improvement in the quality of education and training available to the majority of the population.

The third phase, approximately from 1997 to 1999, was part of a more general reappraisal of policy within the context of the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy and its far tighter fiscal framework. GEAR attempts to address a crucial tension that was undermining implementation of the RDP. On the one hand there was a need to exercise tight control over state expenditure to create the fiscal climate necessary for economic growth. On the other hand, there was a need to redress the inequalities of apartheid and ensure that basic public services (water, sanitation, housing, education, health, security) were delivered to the poor. In this phase, the state sought a stronger impact on the lives of the majority by the delivery of better basic services and, in education, greater access to educational opportunities of better quality and more carefully attuned to personal needs, employment opportunities and social transformation.

GEAR and the subsequent Medium Term Economic Frameworks attempted to overcome the constraints of an austere fiscal policy through an increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of state apparatuses. The Ministry of Finance, the Reserve Bank and Department of State Expenditure (Treasury) were able to implement an austere fiscal regime and control overall state expenditure fairly quickly because these are national competences and decision-making is concentrated within the tight locus of the leadership of these three bodies.

Making state apparatuses more efficient and effective is a far harder and slower task involving a multiplicity of role players including various state departments, provinces, unions and other stakeholder groups. The success of the one side of GEAR (fiscal austerity) and the failure of the other side (efficient and effective delivery of public services) exacerbated the plight of the poor. The shift from an RDP emphasis on equity, redress and basic needs to the stronger economic market orientation of GEAR impacted strongly on transformation in the education system. The viability of policies developed and legislated in phase two under the aegis of the RDP was undermined by the new austerity of GEAR. There was a need for significant policy adjustment. GEAR's success depends partially on a large-scale human resources development programme. The primary responsibility for this programme at a policy level lies with the Departments of Public Service and Administration, Education and Labour. But responsibility for delivery rests with other bodies such as the NSA, the SETAs, and SAQA. In the case of teacher

education, where the DoE has a responsibility as the major employer of teachers, other bodies such as the ELRC, SAQA, the Education, Training and Development Practitioners SETA, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), and SACE also share responsibility and authority.

It was only in the course of 2000 that a number of these bodies became operational, leading to the emergence of a fourth phase in which the focus has shifted strongly to implementation - to having an impact on people's daily lives. This phase is a culmination of previous phases but it is too early to say what its substantive shape will be.

Under the auspices of the DoL, the National Skills Development Act of 1998 established a national skills levy fund (of 1% of employee payrolls for all companies with more than 50 employees) and SETAs to develop skills sector plans and disburse the skills funds through learnerships (apprenticeships) and skills development training. By 2004, more than 70 000 learnerships had been awarded and over 350 000 certificates awarded for skills development achievements primarily in the further education and training field.

In spite of these achievements, there remain strong concerns about the relevance of the curriculum of schooling and of higher education. From a labour market perspective, the education and training system is not developing competent school leavers and graduates. There is a 'misfit' or misalignment between what students learn in the system and what they need outside the system in the world of employment. Although this is being addressed through various initiatives, progress is slow as the re-engineering is expensive and is itself skills-dependent.

It is worth noting the achievements of SAQA in its implementation of the NQF from 1997 to 2006. The start up of the National Standards Bodies (NSB) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGB) structures was rapid. By November 1999, 12 NSBs and 90 SGBs were operational. By May 2001, 180 SGBs had been formed and 137 new qualifications and 2 207 new unit standards had been registered. By 2005 over 200 SGBs had been registered over the preceding six years. By September 2005, there were 113 SGBs operating. These bodies were established and registered efficiently in spite of the enormous logistical exercise involved in identifying and recruiting volunteers from the six constituencies (state departments, organised business, organised labour, providers of education and training, critical interest groups and community/learner organisations) that must be represented on the bodies in terms of SAQA regulations. It can be argued that although inefficient and highly problematic due to the lack of an agreed qualification system or structure and incomplete participation by the full set of stakeholders in the system, these structures and processes were effective in bringing some organisation to standards setting for qualifications development.

By December 2004, there had been two 3-year cycles of 12 NSBs. A total of 8 326 qualifications (631 new and 7 695 provider-based) and 8 946 unit standards (8 797 new and 149 provider-based) were registered. A total of 35 ETQAs were accredited, and by the end of March 2005 legislative-compliance auditing had been accomplished for 30 of these in terms of the audit cycle. As of 1 July 2005, there were 31 accredited ETQAs. The HEQC received the most favourable audit of all ETQAs.

A comparison between 'historical' qualifications (developed by providers) and 'new' qualifications developed after the NQF was established shows a significant increase in qualifications available at NQF levels 3, 4, and 5, even though the numbers are still relatively low. The highest level of activity has been in Organising Field 06 (Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology). A concern has

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been the difficulty of measuring the outputs from these bodies. The number of outputs does not, and cannot, give an indication of the use that is being made of the registered qualifications and standards.

Provider-based 'whole' (non-unit standards based) qualifications are registered, in the main, at levels 5 and above. For example, 2 923 provider-based 'whole' qualifications have been registered at Level 8. By contrast, unit standards have been registered primarily from levels 2-5.

With regard to the relevance of these structures in their current form, the following points are worth noting:

- The structures originally established by SAQA have developed in unexpected ways, influenced by external drivers (in the legislative and political context) and internal drivers (lessons learnt 'on the road').
- The original NSB structures served two terms of office of three years each, but were phased out by 31 March 2005 and replaced by selected consultative panels that consisted of experts from different stakeholder constituencies. These consultative panels performed the function of recommending SGB-generated qualifications and unit standards for registration on the NQF;
- In the initial phases, NSBs and SGBs were constituted by members serving on a voluntary basis (with the logistical costs carried by EU funding). SAQA prioritised those SGBs that could not get funding elsewhere as well as strategically important SGBs. More recently Joint Implementation Plans (JIPs) have been entered into enabling SETAs, professional bodies, government departments and other bodies such as the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to establish SGBs to generate qualifications and standards that meet their particular needs. SAQA is still managing the whole process (from task team meetings to the writing and editing of standards) as well as the funding of the qualifications and standards-generation process.
- The strong emphases given by SAQA to stakeholder inclusivity and participation, and to the transparency and accountability of its practices are indicators of SAQA's commitment to democratic values and practices. It was not unreasonable for SAQA to believe that the creation of democratic spaces within the heart of the education and training system where curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are framed by the setting of standards for qualifications and quality assurance would lead to the emergence of democratic communities of practices which would achieve consensus on how best to translate the generic principles, critical outcomes and level descriptors into specific pedagogic practices.

Granville (2001) notes that the NQF, by focusing solely on statements of specific and critical exit-level outcomes, encourages great flexibility and autonomy for sectoral interests in the development of unit standards and qualifications. The result is a very high number of unit standards and qualifications. The South African approach places a high premium on accurate language. Given the multiplicity of unit standards and qualifications, the discriminating element between all standards and qualifications is the language used to describe them. However, consistency and reliability of language usage cannot be assumed. On the contrary, given the diverse backgrounds of the stakeholder constituencies on SGBs and NSBs, experience suggests that disagreements will more likely be the norm. Perhaps the major and most enduring disagreement in the evolution of South Africa's NQF has been between proponents of occupationally oriented unit standards and advocates of academically or professionally oriented qualifications.

Component 2.2 Governance and the role of government

2.2.a) List all actors in governance and create a matrix of who (e.g. government, quasi-government, assessment centres, public educational institutions, private for-profit education providers, professional bodies, etc.) does what (provides academic/ professional recognition, overseas assessment, etc.) for non-formal and informal learning. If there are more than one body who are responsible for an action (e.g. recognition), list all actors involved and describe how is the coordination managed? If there are more than one ministry of a government are involved, specify which ministries have competencies for what. How clear are the different roles by different actors communicated among themselves as well as to users?

List of 'who does what' for non-formal and informal learning and recognition of such learning

2.2.b) Create the above same matrix for recognition of formal learning for comparative purposes.

List of 'who does what' for formal learning and recognition of such learning

2.2.c) Describe the competencies (direct and indirect role) of government in the practice? Which of the following three models would your country be classified with respect to governance: 1) a 'predominance-of-industry' model; 2) a 'predominance-of-public authorities' model'; and 3) a 'shared responsibility' model. Explain why that model fits into your country context. If there is a trend to shift to another model, describe driving forces for such change. Describe the details. If none of which is suitable to your country, describe your own country model.

2.2.d) Describe, if any, inter-ministerial approaches to the issue? Describe also the policy

The ancillary structures of SAQA through which the NQF is implemented are the SGBs, the NSBs and the ETQAs. The processes of standards generating, standards setting and quality assurance are the means by which unit standards and qualifications are registered on the NQF by SAQA and the institutions providing the programmes leading to these standards and qualifications are:

- audited and accredited (CHE, SETAs/NSA/DoL, Professional Councils);
- registered (DoE and SETAs/NSA/DoL , ETQAs and Professional Councils);
- the programmes leading to these standards and qualifications are accredited, approved and subsidy- or levy-funded (CHE, DoE and SETAs/NSA/DoL);
- the programmes leading to these standards and qualifications are quality assured (CHE/HEQC, Professional Councils and ETQAs).

List of 'who does what' for formal learning and recognition of such learning

Who	What
Minister of Education (in consultation with Minister of Labour)	Determines policy and funding
Minister of Labour	Determines policy for occupational training, for the NSA and SETAs
South African Qualification Authority	Oversees the development of the NQF Oversees standards setting Oversees quality assurance Records learner achievements Registers qualifications on the NQF
Council on Higher Education	Audits and accredits Higher Education providers Accredits and quality assures Higher Education programmes
Umalusi	Audits and accredits Further Education providers Accredits and quality assures Further Education programmes
SETAs	Audit and accredit occupational providers Accredit and quality assure occupational programmes
Professional Councils	Accredit and quality assure professional programmes
National Skills Authority	Manages and disburses funds from skills levy

Table 10: 'Who does what' for formal learning and recognition of such learning

List of 'who does what' for non-formal and informal learning and recognition of such learning

In addition to the above, RPL implementation is the responsibility of:

Who	What
South African Qualifications Authority	Registers qualifications in accordance with pre-agreed criteria, including RPL, on the NQF Develops policy and implementation guidelines
ETQAs, including SETAs, professional body ETQAs and 'band[2]' ETQAs	Develop policy in alignment with national policy, criteria and guidelines Accredit and quality assure education and training institutions that offer RPL services
Education and training institutions	Develop institutional policies and procedures, including assessment procedures and processes Conduct RPL assessment

Table 11: Responsibilities for RPL implementation

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[2] The Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education and Umalusi, the Quality Assurance Council for General and Further Education.

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Through the NQF and RPL, it is the intention to facilitate the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, including experiential learning against registered unit standards and qualifications for the purpose of enhancing access, or awarding credit for learning achieved, where appropriate. Crucially, the roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the recognition of non-formal and informal learning lie with the above bodies.

South Africa has a 'shared responsibility' model, or what is known in the South African lexicon as 'cooperative governance'. Key role players in education at a national level include the DoE and DoL, SAQA, the CHE, the NSA and the SETAs, Umalusi and professional bodies. In South Africa, key stakeholders include state, business, labour, critical interest groups, providers and NGOs.

At present, there are more than 30 bodies involved in quality assurance. This large number of role players with different responsibilities and objectives leads to conflicts of interest which are hard to resolve and undermine the consensus model of stakeholder governance that underlies the new regulatory policy and structures.

The complex maze of organisational structures, processes and procedures, which together make up the various facets of the NQF, have to be carefully put together and aligned to ensure coherence, efficiency and effectiveness. It is only once these regulatory structures and bodies are operating in alignment that implementation can move firmly onto the agenda. Unfortunately, the dispersion of responsibilities and division of authority has produced a decision-making gridlock exacerbated by a general lack of human resource capacity in the system.

Education and training legislation in support of the recognition of prior learning[3]

Since 1994, with the establishment of a new democratically elected government, the South African education and training system has been under intense scrutiny. It is particularly in education and training that the apartheid regime found some of its strongest expression. For this reason, South Africa's new democracy has seen the promulgation of a number of new Acts for the purpose of transforming education and training to be more inclusive of all the learners, including adult learners, of the country. The transformation of education and training has a number of objectives, which include the development of a system more responsive to the needs of the economy, individuals, and society at large. In addition, transformation processes also intend to eradicate past unjust educational policies, particularly policies that prevented people from accessing education and training. RPL is considered to be an important mechanism for opening up access to those previously denied the privilege of quality education. For this reason, in all the new education Acts, explicit and implicit reference is made to the widening of access to non-traditional learners. RPL seems to have become an integral part of the psyche of South African education and training. In a ministerial review of the implementation of the South African NQF (known as the 'Study Team' review) (DoE & DoL, 2002), the slow progress towards the systemic implementation of RPL is mentioned as one of the current disappointments in the SANQF. Nevertheless, as will become evident, the legislative and regulatory framework for the implementation of RPL already exists.

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[3] This section is an extract of an analysis of key education and training legislation promulgated since 1995 (from Blom, 2004:17–26).

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The South African Qualifications Authority Act, Regulations, Policies and Guidelines

SAQA's *National Standards Bodies Regulations* (RSA, 1998a), in particular, are specific regarding RPL. These regulations provide an overarching definition of RPL and are explicit about its inclusion in the development, design and construction of qualifications. For example, the requirements for the registration of qualifications on the NQF make clear that a qualification shall:

> indicate in the rules governing the award of the qualification that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience (1998a:6).

This means that every NQF-registered qualification, in principle at the very least, can be achieved through RPL.

The *ETQA Regulations* (RSA, 1998b) of the SAQA Act are equally explicit about RPL, but from a quality assurance point of view: in the criteria for accreditation of institutions, an institution may be accredited if it has the necessary "policies and practices for the management of assessment" (including RPL) (1998b:7).

In addition, SAQA as the body responsible for the development and implementation of the NQF has developed a national RPL policy, namely: *The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework*, (SAQA, 2002a). In this policy, RPL in the South African context refers specifically to the facilitation of "access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; and redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities" (2002a:9). The policy proposes a set of quality criteria as minimum requirements for the development and implementation of RPL. Further, a guidelines document, *The Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning* (2003) was developed with the purpose of aiding implementation at the level of the education and training provider.

The Skills Development Act, Regulations, Policies and Guidelines

The Skills Development Act (RSA, 1998c) provides for an institutional framework for the implementation of national, sector and workplace strategies with the purpose of improving the skills of the South African workforce. The drive behind the development of processes for RPL emanated mainly from the need of the labour force to achieve recognition for learning and skills attained through work and life experiences, particularly as these people were prevented from accessing education and training by unjust educational policies of the past. This Act is explicit about the need for redress. One of the purposes of this Act is "to improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education" (1998c:4).

Under the Skills Development Act, statutory bodies with the responsibility of assuring quality education and training in designated sectors were instituted. These bodies are known as SETAs. The SETAs have to facilitate development and implementation of RPL processes for the workforce in their sectors and quality assure the processes. Together with the Act, the SETAs are powerful drivers for the implementation of RPL.

Higher Education Acts and Policies

The Higher Education Act (RSA, 1997) states its position on access and redress in its preamble, namely that it is desirable to "redress past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access" (1997:2).

However, it is in the Education White Paper (*A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*, No 3 of 1997), that these principles are expressed explicitly, namely that the "higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities" (1997:2).

The White Paper goes further to say that the South African Ministry [of Education's] vision is that of a transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education that will promote equity of access and a fair chance of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities.

In addition, the White Paper proposes that a single, nationally coordinated system will enhance the broadening of the social base of the higher education system in terms of race, class, gender and age. It is intended that a new system will cater for a considerably more diverse body of learners than in the past. The White Paper states that higher education will open its doors, in the spirit of lifelong learning, to workers, professionals and adult learners in pursuit of multi-skilling and reskilling, whose access to higher education was thwarted in the past.

The White Paper also suggests that such a system will enable the removal of "obstacles, which unnecessarily limit learners' access to programmes, and enable proper academic recognition to be given for prior learning achieved, thus permitting greater horizontal and vertical mobility by learners in the higher education system" (1997:8).

Further, in the White Paper's discussion of admission and selection procedures, the issue of RPL is highlighted, in the statement that the Ministry of Education "strongly supports developmental work and pilot projects which will help institutions to develop criteria to assess applicants' prior learning and experience, so that those with clear potential to succeed in higher education can be admitted" (1997:15).

The CHE is the statutory body established to provide for a single nationally coordinated system of higher education. It also has the task of managing quality assurance and quality promotion in higher education and, as such, is similar in function to the SETAs. For this purpose, a draft document, A *New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education* (CHE, 2001) was published in December 2001[4]. The position of the CHE in terms of RPL is clear. It uses a comprehensive description of RPL, namely:

> RPL is a way of recognising what individuals already know and can do. RPL is based on the premise that people learn both inside and outside formal learning structures (including learning from work and life experience) and this learning can be worthy of recognition and credit …RPL is used extensively by those seeking: admission to a course; advanced standing for a course; or credits towards a qualification. It can also be

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[4] Two subsequent drafts of the New Academic Policy entitled *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (Department of Education, 2004b and 2006b) have been made public.

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used by those seeking entry to a particular field of employment; promotion or self-development (CHE, 2001:142).

The draft policy distinguishes between two types of RPL: the recognition of accredited learning and the recognition of prior experiential learning. The second type of RPL, in particular, is seen to be facilitated by the development of a common standardised currency in terms of the level of qualifications and the credits awarded to such qualifications. In the words of the policy, higher education institutions "will need to develop appropriate, consistent and quality assured RPL policies, practices and assessment instruments based on the specification of entry requirements and learning outcomes" (CHE, 2001:104).

However, despite the Higher Education Act and the draft New Academic Policy's clear principled expression supporting the recognition of prior learning, at least two current statutory regulations are inhibiting the development and implementation of RPL within the public and private higher education institutions.

Matriculation[5] with Endorsement as Entry Requirement to Higher Education

In 1918, the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) came into being as a result of a Royal Charter establishing the first South African university in 1873, with the purpose of governing the entry of candidates for first degree studies at the university. Its statutory obligations were to:

- determine the minimum statutory requirements for first degree studies at South African universities
- conduct the matriculation examination as the norm examination for university admission
- maintain equivalent standards at various senior certificate examinations leading to university admission (South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association [SAUVCA], 2001).

This statute determined the criteria according to which candidates were granted access to higher education up to 4 September 1992, when the JMB was dissolved. The norm-determining and norm-equivalating functions were transferred to the South African Certification Council (SAFCERT), which was, in its turn, replaced by Umalusi (the General and Further Education Quality Assurance Council), in 2003. The function of determining university admission was transferred to the Committee of University Principals (CUP), also known as The South African Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA[6]).

These old statutory regulations have had a profound effect on admissions to higher education. In the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning* (SAQA, 2003:10), the following observation is made:

Many institutional practices have emanated from the deeply entrenched view that only an elite few may have access to education and training, particularly in higher education.

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[5] The formal school-leaving certificate at the end of the 12th year of schooling in South Africa.

[6] SAUVCA has been reconstituted to include the new Universities of Technology and is now known as Higher Education South Africa (HESA).

Nevertheless, when the Matriculation Board of the Committee of University Principals (CUP) came into being, a key change, with the purpose of opening up access to larger numbers of non-traditional learners, was affected. This is known as the Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption, which makes provision for the admittance of non-traditional students. It reads as follows (SAUVCA, 2001:54):

Certificate of conditional exemption by virtue of certificate issued by the senate of a university

(1) The Committee of Principals shall issue a certificate of conditional exemption to a person who, in the opinion of the Senate of a university, has demonstrated, in a selection process approved by that Senate, that he or she is suitable for admission to bachelor's degree studies, which certificate shall be valid for admission to that university only.
(2) The issuing of such a certificate shall be provisional and shall not entitle a university to claim a subsidy for the person before a certificate of complete exemption is issued to him or her, but shall nevertheless entitle the university to admit him or her to bachelor's degree studies and to award credit(s) towards a degree of that university for work completed towards the degree.
(3) Where the Senate of a university certifies that a holder of a certificate of conditional exemption issued in terms of this paragraph has completed one full credit of instructional offerings, the Committee of Principals shall issue a certificate of exemption to him or her dated from the date of coming into operation of the certificate of conditional exemption.

This statement could be viewed as a form of recognising prior learning, but is applicable only to candidates who have completed their final year of schooling (Grade 12). 'Non-traditional' students therefore refers only to learners who have a school-leaving certificate, but without the minimum requirements for entry into a university. In this way, the Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption does not cover the thousands of learners who were prevented or discouraged from completing formal schooling and who may have left school at an earlier stage, for example at Grade 10 or 11.

The 50% Residency Clause

The 50% residency clause emanates from the same old statutes (Joint Statutes, 1918), and while this clause was not originally intended to be used in terms of RPL, it is now used to avoid awarding formal credits in higher education to learners who meet most (or all) of the requirements for a particular qualification as evidenced through the assessment of prior learning. This clause was developed to facilitate credit transfer between institutions of higher learning where a learner wanted access to an institution other than the institution where he or she was first enrolled (i.e. when relocating), or when study was interrupted. Essentially it means that even if a learner meets all of the requirements for the achievement of a qualification through the recognition of his or her prior learning, that learner still has to complete 50% of the qualification with the new institution before the institution is willing to award a qualification. This practice may be particularly associated with the funding formula for public higher education institutions.

While the Joint Statute has been repealed by the Higher Education Act (Number 101 of 1997), "The joint statutes and joint regulations and rules made in terms of the Universities Act, 1955 (Act 61 of 1955), and the Technikons Act, 1993 (Act

125 of 1993), [will] continue to exist until the date or dates contemplated in subsection (2)" of the Higher Education Act. These currently pose important inhibitors to the development and implementation of RPL, particularly in higher education.

Further Education and Training (FET) Legislation and Policies

As in the Higher Education Act, the Further Education and Training Act (Number 98 of 1998) states its position regarding redress and access in the preamble to the Act. It is in the *National Curriculum Framework for Further Education and Training* (DoE, 1999), however, where more direct reference is made to recognition of prior learning:

> Access to the FET band can be gained through the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC) or equivalent qualification corresponding to NQF level 1, as well as by other means, e.g. via recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes (1999:4).

In the discussion of the principles underpinning the new approach to further education and training, the issues of redress and access are referred to explicitly:

> The Policy Framework for Curriculum Development is based on principles that arise out of the need for redress, access, equity and quality; and drives all national policies for the reconstruction and development of education and training (1999:14).

A large section of the National Curriculum Framework is devoted to assessment of prior learning and is highlighted as important, especially in the FET context. RPL in the FET band serves a variety of purposes; it intends to:

- promote continuous learning by allowing learners who can demonstrate achievement of outcomes to progress along a learning path, irrespective of the learning context
- allow learners to earn credits towards a qualification in less that the usual time where this is feasible
- assist adults to capitilise on their accumulated prior knowledge and skills and thereby reduce the amount of time needed to fulfil qualification requirements
- benefit women and those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, who may be able to demonstrate ability even though they may lack formal qualifications
- enable learners wishing to diversify from one learning field to transfer between programmes
- facilitate re-entering into FET programmes
- benefit adult learners by making available alternative routes to education and training, whilst enabling mobility in career and learning pathways (DoE, 1999)

However, the development of RPL policies and systems has been slowest in the public FET sector. To date, no formal policy that will govern RPL at FET institutions has been drafted.

Conclusion

The legislation supporting regulation, policies, frameworks and guidelines discussed in this section represents the most important sample of the new legislative and regulatory frameworks for a transforming education and training

system in South Africa. It seems that the conceptualisation, particularly regarding RPL as an important mechanism for redress and the opening up of access, has taken place and that, in principle, these formal pieces of legislation and regulation are in agreement in terms of the need for RPL in many different contexts and bands. There seems to be coherence and a common understanding of the possible purposes, and certainly of the benefits of RPL, for education and training in the wider context. However, a cautionary note seems to creep into discussion about RPL, both in the draft *New Academic Policy* (CHE, 2001), as well as in the discussion document: The *National Curriculum Framework for the FET* (DoE, 1999). In the higher education context for example, it is noted that:

> RPL remains a highly contested area in higher education. A key issue in the RPL debate is the nature of different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing, and whether or not RPL can serve as a catalyst for the transformation of the higher education curriculum (CHE, 2001:104).

Likewise, but on a more practical level, the National Curriculum Framework for FET indicates that "RPL still needs to be researched for its effective utilisation" (DoE, 1999:32).

Component 2.3 Resources

2.3.a) Who is/are the financing body(ies) for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning? What is the policy thinking behind such financing? What is the annual budget 2004/2005? (Please convert to Euro.) Provide data, if possible, on the breakdown of how the budget has been spent.

2.3.b) If the system has existed for some years, please provide the budget data since it existed. Has there been any increase/decrease of budget for recognition of non-formal and informal learning since a framework/system has been taken up? If so, describe any elements that have driven such change.

2.3.c) Who pays for the assessment and recognition processes? If an individual is to pay, how much is it cost to him/her? Break down the costs by levels assessed or by types of subjects assessed, if relevant. Are there any cost-sharing arrangements between educational institutions and employers, between education institutions and government, etc.? Describe the costs arrangements.

2.3.d) How many assessment centres and/or assessors exist to date, if any? Where are such assessment centres located? Please specify the areas/regions with characteristics of such areas/regions (e.g. the average income, the income disparity, etc.) How was the decision made where to locate such centers? How much does it cost to maintain such centres and/or assessors? How many training programmes exist: specify how many in a given year, if there are significant increases per year? How much does it cost to train such assessors? Break down by levels assessed, if relevant.

At present, there is no formal, systemic funding system for RPL in South Africa. In most cases, institutions fund their own RPL activities, including the development of procedures and infrastructure as needed (see discussion in section 5).

In some cases, individual applicants would be expected to pay for RPL services, but in other cases the cost is carried by an employer or through sponsorships.

There is no standard cost structure, as the contexts within which RPL is undertaken may be vastly different. In the national policy the broad guideline is:

> 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, is not unlike the costs involved in the development of 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… 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 (SAQA, 2002).

A limited number of assessment centres, which focus purely on RPL, exist. These centres are ad hoc and were established through local initiatives due to local needs. A small number of private initiatives, focusing on the corporate market, have emerged.

This is in contrast with the importance given to RPL as espoused in national policy. One of the requirements for ETQAs to be accredited by SAQA is to provide evidence in relation to RPL policies and procedures – both as a requirement for the ETQA, as well as for its constituent providers of education and training. However, in the monitoring of the 33 ETQAs in 2002–2003, it was found that "there is an emerging trend indicating that ETQAs are not implementing RPL on a large scale and in accordance with the SAQA policy and criteria… In a few instances where implementation has taken place these were isolated initiatives" (SAQA, 2004:15). In addition, at the time of the monitoring cycle, many ETQAs were still at the stage of developing their policies. In the subsequent audit of ETQAs, in 2003 and 2004, it was found that while all ETQAs had policies and procedures for RPL, these had still not been implemented and there still seems to be a poor understanding of RPL as a discrete activity (SAQA, 2006:41):

> Embracing the concept and importance of the recognition of prior learning has not been an issue for any ETQA… they have to date tended only to construct guideline documents for their constituencies on the processes and practice of RPL. There have, however, been one or two exceptions, and the RPL project financed by one SETA and quality assured by its ETQA is a best practice example of how this principle can be achieved. It is critical to note, however, that had the strong working relationship between the parent SETA, the ETQA, the external funders, industry and the learners themselves not been the base from which they had worked, this project would not have been the success it was.

While new policies have proposed to make targeted funding available for RPL, this has not yet been realised.

Component 2.4 Others

2.4.a) Provide any other institutional arrangements that you think are the most important characteristics that exist in your country, which have not been addressed in above Component 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

Theoretically, RPL in South Africa should have had a much greater uptake than it has had since the implementation of the South African NQF. The National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and its supporting Acts and regulations which could potentially be an important source of funds through the National Skills Fund (NSF) and the levy system payable by all organisations with more than 50 employees, have not been utilised for RPL to any great extent. Further, such funds are available to SETAs only and are administered through the National DoL, which inhibits other ETQAs (outside occupational sectors) from accessing these funds for RPL activities in the other sectors of the system, particularly providers of education and training, including public institutions, which are broadly located within the DoE.

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Component 3: Description of technical arrangements

Component 3.1 qualifications, qualification systems, qualification framework

3.1.a) What term does your country use for 'Recognition of non-formal and informal learning'? Please provide the original term in your own language as well as the literally translated term in English. Please describe if the term has certain connotations, implications, specific associations, etc.

3.1.b) Describe if recognising of non-formal and informal learning is liked to qualifications, qualification systems, or qualifications framework in your country. Provide data, if any, the impact of such linkages.

3.1.c) What kinds of qualifications (e.g. certificates, diplomas, degrees, licenses, etc.) are more linked to recognition of non-formal and informal learning? What are the difficulties or obstacles in linking recognition of non-formal and informal learning to qualification framework?

3.1.d) Describe if there are differences in such linkages depending on whether the qualifications are professional or academic recognition? Can the link to the qualification systems legitimacy of such recognition be a means for establishing 'legitimacy' both in working life and in the educational system ?

3.1.e) If your country has a national qualification framework or in the process of establishing one, has the development towards recognition of non-formal and informal learning been of the drivers for your country to establish one? Is the development of the qualification framework and its implementation in practice with the recognition of non-formal and informal learning in parallel?

3.1.f) What are some potential threats of recognition of non-formal and informal learning to higher education institutions, employers, and individuals? How can resistance from the higher education sector be overcome to embed the recognition of non-formal and informal learning into the qualification framework?

RPL in South Africa recognises that learning occurs in all kinds of situations, formally, informally and non-formally. To protect the integrity of the process, measurement of the learning takes place against specific learning outcomes required for a specific qualification and in principle, if successful, a learner could be awarded credits for such learning if it meets the requirements of the qualification.

In the SAQA policy (2002a) the process of recognising prior learning is described in the following steps:

- identifying what the candidate[7] 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
- crediting the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past

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[7] "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.

RPL is thus very explicitly linked to qualifications, and the achievement of credits towards such qualifications. In theory, and in accordance with the requirements for qualifications to be registered on the NQF, all qualifications could be achieved through RPL. However, as noted before, two 'types' of RPL have emerged over the past few years: RPL for credit and RPL for access. The first is usually associated with general and further education and training (and then mostly for competence-based training, against unit standards), and the latter with higher education. These two types of RPL, in turn, are associated with very different approaches: a 'credit-exchange' approach, a 'developmental' approach, 'radical' RPL and 'Trojan horse' RPL.

Credit exchange[8]

The term 'credit-exchange', or competence-based model for RPL, was coined by Butterworth (1992:40) and is described as "the ability of the individual to perform certain job tasks or roles to a pre-defined standard" (1992:41). This type of RPL is usually closely associated with a consumer-orientated and utilitarian view of experiential learning, i.e. it looks at market-related performance as it matches or 'fits' prescribed outcomes. It has an "extrinsic, economic use-value" (Harris, 1999:127). The only experience likely to be recognised is that which agrees with particular content of the curriculum. Luckett (1999) maintains that it is likely to be practised in the natural and applied sciences and in industrial training and workplace contexts.

The critique of this approach is in terms of the lack of engagement with the nature of knowledge. RPL undertaken in this manner challenges the "site of knowledge production", but not "what counts as knowledge and who produces it" (Luckett, 1999:71). This is a very common view of RPL in South Africa. The SAQA RPL policy (2002a) warns against the "purely technical application, dislocated from a particular individual and broader context" (2002a:12) where knowledge is decontextualised and discrete parts of a qualification are assessed.

A developmental approach

Butterworth (1992) proposes an improved approach to RPL – that of the developmental model. In this model, the emphasis is not on the matching of competence with pre-agreed standards where, if a successful 'fit' is established credit is given to the learner, but rather on what the learner has learned through the experience. Evans (1992:7) maintains in this regard:

> The insistence throughout must be that the experience of a student is significant only as a source of learning. The intellectual task of moving from a description of experience to an identification of the learning derived from that experience is demanding. But if it cannot be accomplished, there is no learning to assess, however important to the individual that experience may have been.

Harris (1999) suggests that as in the case of the credit-exchange model, the nature of knowledge is not challenged. At most, the developmental model is "a translation device, a one-way bridge-building process" (1999:130) between different knowledge forms – that of experience, and that of "canonical bodies of knowledge" (1999:130) so prevalent in higher education.

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[8] From Heyns (2004:30–35)

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Therefore, the articulation of 'equivalences' between experiential and formal learning is highly contested unless the experiential learning fits into the hierarchical disciplinary knowledge. In addition, yet again, RPL assessment is on discrete parts of the curriculum and the curriculum per se, and the knowledge underpinning the curriculum is not challenged.

Therefore, the two most prominent models for the assessment and recognition of prior learning seem to be most likely to empower the already empowered; i.e. those learners who have had sufficient exposure to discipline-based learning, in addition to experience, to engage with a RPL process. Harris (1999:132) describes this situation as follows:

> Prior learning is valued largely in terms of its similarity to pre-existing conceptions of 'desirable' knowledge and skill… The gatekeepers have widened the gates slightly in terms of greater flexibility regarding the site of knowledge production but care is taken not to let any actual 'outsider knowledge' slip through unnoticed.

Osman & Castle (2001:3) maintain that the developmental model prevails in higher education precisely "because it represents a pragmatic and systematic approach to the 'portability' of prior learning…it does not threaten institutional autonomy, standards, or existing ways of organising curricula".

Therefore, candidates for prior learning may find themselves in a situation where their informal learning is often viewed as irrelevant and inappropriate to formal learning situations. The range of 'acceptable' prior learning is limited to those aspects that fall within the codes and prescriptions of institutions, which limitation serves to maintain the status quo in pedagogy and curricula.

Radical RPL

Radical RPL (Harris, 1999:133) is closely linked to "societal transformation, liberation and redress" for the common good of the collective. This approach found strong support in the pre-1994 election period in South Africa. However, where the collective rather than the individual becomes the focus, Harris (1999:134) warns that radical practices have the tendency to "exclude diversity, obscure difference and silence the voices of those falling outside the dominant (albeit alternative ['radical']) grouping", thereby resulting in an almost reversed 'racism', in which only the experience of the emancipated group counts as knowledge.

Luckett (1999:72) refers to this kind of RPL as "the critical paradigm", where knowledge is understood to be "politically interested as well as socially constructed" (1999:72). The assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the curriculum are challenged, particularly from an emancipatory point of view; i.e. the "experience, especially that of oppressed classes and groups would be viewed as authentic" (1999:72).

However, both Harris and Luckett agree that 'emancipatory' RPL, from the point of view that learning from experience can "lead to social and political transformation, has all too often not been realised" (Harris, 1999:134).

'Trojan-horse' (transformational) RPL

Harris's (1999:134) final proposition for a RPL model is called the "Trojan-horse approach". The Trojan-horse approach calls for "an enquiry into the social construction of knowledge and curricula" (1999:135) in ways in which both experiential knowledge and discipline-based knowledge move closer to (and complement) each other. A two-way bridge needs to be constructed whereby practice-based learning and discipline-based learning feature equally strongly, in far more flexible ways than in traditional curricula, through a "mutual engagement and critique, a new shared language for understanding knowledges and modes of meaning" (1999:135). Osman & Castle (2001:4) maintain that university educators "accept that experiential knowledge is distinct from academic ways of knowing, and that learning that occurs in a variety of contexts is not always transferable, but. …that they may be interdependent rather than exclusive". Such an approach makes it possible to determine knowledge equivalence, whereby 'general credit', rather than specific, discipline-based credit, is awarded (Harris, 1999).

The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) Teacher Education Team (2002:6) describes this model as "transformational" (p. 6) and an approach whereby RPL seeks to "recognise non-formal and experiential learning for itself rather than attempting to articulate and match such knowledge and learning with knowledge prevalent in the receiving institution".

Therefore, the debates seem to indicate that "knowledge is [not] universal, externalised, decontextualised and value-free" (Harris, 1999:126). Traditional ways of viewing experiential learning as "neutral and available to rationality", i.e. to transform experience into a one-on-one relationship to the types of knowledge required in discipline-based learning, are not possible or not even the correct position to take. Harris maintains that experiential learning is "partial, socially constructed, highly contextualised" (Harris, 1999:126).

The Trojan-horse approach therefore poses challenges to "the way we teach, what we teach, when we teach, and what we think is worth teaching" (Osman & Castle, 2001a:3) and furthermore, challenges the validity of curricula in general.

Luckett (1999:73) suggests "we should not attempt, via RPL, to strip learners of their particular identities and turn them into "universal knowers" who are capable of "true self knowledge"; we should rather assist with "the negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of the academia" (Osman & Castle, 2001 in Heyns, 2004:30–35).

The South African NQF

South Africa has implemented a comprehensive qualifications framework, which encompasses all levels and types of qualifications offered by a wide range of institutions. Many qualifications frameworks have been implemented (or are being implemented) over the last two decades. The most distinctive features shared by most of the NQFs include:

- a single system of levels for all qualifications
- qualifications based on learning outcomes
- modular/unitised qualifications
- assessment based on explicit criteria
- a national system of credit accumulation and transfer
- a common approach to describing qualifications
- a common classification system for subjects and occupational sectors

"The value of an NQF lies in its potential to contribute to policy goals such as lifelong learning or improving the quality of education" (ILO, unpublished). In South Africa, in addition to the aspects listed above, there is also a particular emphasis on the redress of past unjust education and training practices, which were characterised by exclusion and elitism. RPL is seen to be an important mechanism whereby access to further education to learners previously excluded can be facilitated, and whereby the redress of past education injustices can be achieved. The definition of RPL, as captured in the National Standards Bodies Regulations (RSA, 1998a), clarifies what RPL means in the South African context:

> 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.

The following extract represents SAQA's policy on RPL (SAQA, 2002:6-11):

> Recognition of prior learning in South Africa has, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, a very specific agenda. RPL intends to support transformation of the education and training system of this country.
>
> This calls for an approach to the development of RPL policy and practices, which explicitly address the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment. Such an approach must generate the commitment of all role players to removing these barriers and to building a system that is visible, usable and widely recognized as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning. Very importantly, it has to generate consensus around the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of all assessments will be protected, while at the same time extending the opportunities and benefits of RPL to all learners and stakeholders. It is also imperative that it builds a viable, sustainable and credible system.

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
- an acknowledgement of the dynamic nature of the construction of knowledge which will come into play as the system matures

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 recognition of prior learning in South Africa. It incorporates the principles of good assessment, i.e. fairness, validity, reliability and practicability, 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 systematically and consciously

redefine which knowledges[9] are 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 sets out the key elements of a holistic approach:

- A holistic approach to assessment is deeply committed to the development and maintenance of assessment systems that protect the integrity of standards, qualifications and institutions.
- A holistic approach to assessment 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.
- A holistic approach to assessment 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.
- A holistic approach to assessment allocates high priority to learner-centred support systems that will assist in the preparation for assessment.
- A holistic approach to 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.
- A holistic approach to assessment 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.
- A holistic approach to assessment recognises the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles that candidates bring into an assessment situation.
- A holistic approach to learning, teaching and assessment 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.
- A holistic approach to assessment 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 learners[10] in formal education.
- A holistic approach 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.

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[9] The 'knowledges' mentioned here include 'workers' knowledge, women's knowledge and indigenous knowledge' which in the past were not consciously included in curricula and learning programmes.

[10] 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.

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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 possible, making use of existing infrastructure and resources. RPL policies must be integrated into existing processes, structures and projects, but 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 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 presupposes implementation plans with sustainability targets against which the system measures its progress towards the objectives of the plan. ETQAs will have an important role to play in facilitating and monitoring the progress towards full implementation of RPL.

The differing contexts within which RPL is implemented

The contexts within which RPL is practised are as varied as the candidates seeking credits for learning achieved. RPL is practiced in the Higher Education and Training (HET), FET and GET Bands and in ABET, in formal institutions of learning, 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 whole (non-unit standards based) qualifications. Qualifications based on unit standards and whole qualifications are equally valid expressions of outcomes-based education and it is unwarranted to perpetuate a division between these two types of qualification. 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 are practised will be linked to the varied reasons for embarking on a process of recognition of prior learning.

These reasons include:

- 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
- career or job change, etc.

RPL practice therefore cannot take a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. However, all RPL practice will be measured against the agreed criteria, which are considered the core or basis upon which all RPL systems are developed. These criteria deal

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with the institutional environment, services and support to learners, training of assessors and key personnel, methods and processes of assessment, quality management systems, fees and curriculum development.

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.

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

Two distinct target groups are identified in the policy: 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 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, and this can greatly enrich the learning experience of all involved in a programme. However, it is recognised that a particular quality and level of engagement with programmes is required for these candidates to be in a position to acquire the kind of knowledge, skills and competencies required for progression and mobility. Such candidates have to be able to properly engage with programmes characterised by higher levels of breadth, depth and complexity. For these target groups, strategies such as 'advanced standing', 'extended curricula', bridging, foundation and/or access programmes, etc. are appropriate, since a certain level of academic ability can be assumed to be in place.

This is likely to be practised 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 offered to learners at such institutions.

In terms of redress, the target group 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 by the education and training policies of the past. Such candidates will most likely have very low levels of education. The focus of RPL in this target group may be mostly certification as an end in itself, thereby granting recognition for their contribution to the development of this country and validating their value as people and as employees, rather than opening up access to enter into further education and training (even though this may be a purpose as well). 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).

Both in the case of 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 have left formal education, either prematurely or at the end of a formal programme, and who have over a number of years built up substantial amounts of learning through short learning programmes. Short programmes (short courses or skills progammes) 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, and 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' approach. RPL will increasingly become a mechanism for recognising skills, knowledge and values thus acquired.

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

As the education and training system of South Africa matures, it will increasingly require of institutions to question and reshape fundamental values, beliefs and paradigms in order to force the negotiation of the world of experience and the world of the academic (Osman & Castle, 2001). It will encourage providers to become not only sites of learning, which define and construct knowledge, but also sites of learning that examine and engage with the context of knowledge creation. As such, it should seek a meeting place for the different traditions of knowledge emanating from different sites of practice.

This will make it possible to determine the conceptual understanding demonstrated by a candidate compared with that required for the outcomes specified, rather than being overly concerned about literal matching. As assessors become experienced and the system proves it can support a credible process, we will not have to look for total correspondence between a qualification or unit standard and a candidate's prior learning – rough equivalence will do. Then, the characterisation of RPL as being exclusively a comparison of previous experience against learning outcomes for a specified qualification, could be expanded to include a comparison of learning against a particular level of expertise common to a range of qualifications at a particular level of the NQF, thereby moving away from a purely technical approach to a holistic approach, taking into account the complexity and depth of learning to be recognised in communities of practice outside of formal education and the ways in which adult learners are differently prepared for entry into learning programmes. Thus, RPL systems can be developed which 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 (SAQA, 2002a).

An outcomes-based approach

The South African NQF is based on an outcomes-based approach to education and training, which is meant to enhance the recognition of informal and non-formal learning against specified outcomes. The following extract is from a paper by Heyns (2004b:88–104), which discusses a possible approach to the development of assessment instruments for RPL in South Africa.

To assess prior non-formal or informal learning, the 'results of learning' rather than the 'inputs to learning' are assessed, which could make it possible to award credits/exemptions regardless of where and how the learning was attained. Qualifications and unit standards are therefore being developed and registered on the NQF in terms of the outcomes expected to be achieved by the learner on completion of the learning programme that leads to the attainment of the qualification.

According to Statistics South Africa (2003), the greatest potential number of RPL candidates falls between NQF level 2–4 (see Figure 10). Countless numbers of potential learners are therefore being prevented from entering higher education because they do not have a school-leaving certificate. The school-leaving certificate (matriculation, and matriculation with endorsement) is still the most important way to give learners access to higher education.
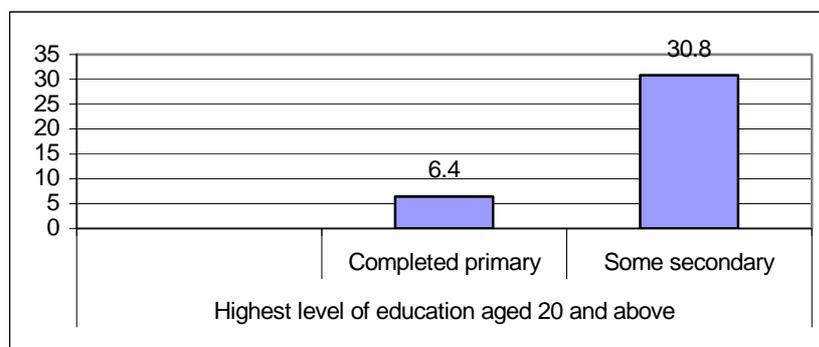
Figure 10: Highest level of education aged 20 and above (Stats SA, 2003)

The importance of establishing mechanisms whereby these potential learners could gain access and whereby their learning could be assessed as equivalent to the requirements for entry to further and higher education or credit towards such qualifications, is therefore critical.

One of the basic principles of the NQF is an outcomes-based approach to education and training. This means that each qualification and unit standard has to make clear what the purpose and expected outcomes are when a learner has successfully completed the learning programme. A clear expression of what a learner will know and be able to do at the end of a programme facilitates portability, articulation and credit transfers between education and training streams, bands and learning fields, as well as the recognition of prior learning, because the clear descriptions of learning indicate the applied competence required on completion of the programme. Thus, every qualification and unit standard registered on the NQF has at least a purpose statement, exit-level outcomes and assessment criteria.

The format of qualifications and unit standards facilitates an understanding of what should be assessed to determine applied competence. Applied competence is usually captured in the purpose statement for a qualification or unit standard. Taking the three qualifications and the unit standard selected as examples, it is clear that the purpose of the qualification captures the core, the most important elements and the rationale for the qualification. The purpose is an important starting point for gaining an understanding of what should be assessed.

Determining 'equivalence of learning'

As noted before, learners who approach a provider/institution for recognition of their prior learning do not arrive with pre-packaged pieces of learning that can simply be matched against the learning outcomes of a qualification. Prior learning is often unstructured, tacit and intuitive. It is the task of the evidence facilitator or advisor to assist learners to identify equivalences to the evidence required to prove applied competence. In order to do so, the evidence facilitator/advisor and the assessor (if they are not the same person), must identify such equivalences. This requires an in-depth understanding of the

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applied competence and the purpose of the qualification. Rather than assessing each discrete part of a qualification, as would take place in a formal institutional environment, the RPL learner will be assessed on his or her integrated understanding[11] of the learning field.

Component 3.2 Credit accumulation and transfer

3.2.a) Describe any formal credit arrangements for non-formal and informal learning, if they exist. What are general policies, objectives, and legislative, regulatory of sectoral agreement frameworks for such credit arrangements? How are the arrangements used - at similar levels, between different levels, or between different sectors. Provide data, if any, of actual users (number of users, at what level, which sector, transition path, etc.)

3.2.b) Who is/are responsible for credit arrangements for non-formal and informal learning? Is it different from the arrangements for formal learning?

3.2.c) How is a credit counted? Number of hours of a course? Please specify how credits are counted on what base in your country.

3.2.d) What are the incentives or disincentives for participants to gain credit and providers to give credit?

3.2.e) Describe, if any, how the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is integrated in your VET system through credit system: e.g. the dual system to integrate experiential learning.

3.2.f) Provide data, if any, how the recognition of non-formal and informal learning is integrated in your HED system through credit system: e.g. research on the growing number of take-up of internships, etc.

This section explores the extent to which the South African NQF may be developed to include a fully functioning CAT system. The extract is taken from an exploratory study undertaken by SAQA (2006:26-29).

It is assumed that the NQF, in its current form, is not a CAT system, but that it does provide the framework wherein such a system can be developed. This position is supported by Naude et al (2005:3):

> The South African NQF has included a strong focus on access, mobility and progression, yet it cannot be described as a CAT system. Through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), an integrated approach and a call for greater parity of esteem between education and training providers, progress towards credit accumulation and transfer have been made, but not to the extent that we can say the NQF is a CAT system.

Current state of credit accumulation and transfer in South Africa

As mentioned earlier, the South African NQF, like most other NQFs, is also a credit-based system where one credit equals 10 notional hours of learning. Qualifications and standards are registered at specific levels of the NQF and have a specific credit value.

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[11] *Integrated Assessment in the context of the South African NQF* (SAQA, 2005b) was published to take the notion of integrated assessment, also for RPL, into the public domain.

Because unit standards, unit standard-based qualifications and non-unit standard-based qualifications[12] are included on the NQF, credits can be grouped in a variety of ways, not all of which are yet accommodated on the NQF:

1. separate unit standard (i.e. not as part of a qualification)
2. unit standard within a unit standard-based qualification
3. complete qualification (unit standard-based or non-unit standard-based)
4. module within a non-unit standard-based qualification

Of these four examples, the first three are currently accommodated, while the fourth is not. In addition to the groupings mentioned above, it is also possible that a learner may partially complete a unit standard or module. Recognition for such learning can not presently be accommodated on the NQF, although it may be recognised within a particular institution. In summary, it can be said that credit accumulation (i.e. the totaling of [general] credits required to complete a qualification or a part of a qualification that is usually limited to a particular institution and/or programme) is possible within the South African system, but that credit transfer (i.e. the the vertical or horizontal relocation of [specific] credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or higher level that usually takes place between different institutions and/or programmes) is limited to unit standard-based qualifications only.

The extent to which this 'limited' credit transfer takes place is yet to be determined. This may be due in part to the relatively short time in which the NQF has been implemented when compared with other countries, but it remains to be seen if the NQF in its current form has had a significant impact on credit transfer, albeit mainly for unit-standard based qualifications.

The Second Cycle of the NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2005a) suggests a similar conclusion. Based on the data gathered, the portability of qualifications (Indicator 3, defined as "'the extent to which qualifications facilitate the mobility of learners horizontally, diagonally and vertically", 2005a:45), was rated as having only a minimal impact on the transformation of education and training. A finding that confirmed the earlier indicative finding made in 2004 (see the Cycle 1 Report, SAQA, 2004b) is:

> The questionnaire returns suggest that respondents were fairly equivocal about the level of progress [of the portability of qualifications] and the interviews threw up few concrete examples of portability (SAQA, 2005a:47).

Table 12 (from SAQA, 2005) provides a more detailed overview of the responses related to portability[13]:

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[12] The inclusion of both unit standard-based and non-unit standard-based qualifications on the South African NQF marked an important concession, one that has not been unique to South Africa, nor one that has been without substantial criticism. A paper by Michael Irwin (1997) from New Zealand offers some useful perspectives on this matter.

[13] See the report for a detailed discussion on the sampling and research design.

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	Disagree/ strongly disagree	Agree/ strongly agree	Don't know/ too soon to say
Learners know about qualifications that follow or articulate with NQF qualifications	33.1%	39.3%	27.6%
Learners with NQF qualifications are able to move between vocational, professional and academic streams	11.1%	60.5%	28.1%
NQF qualifications offered by some institutions are seen as more portable than NQF qualifications offered by others	12.3%	48.6%	39.1%
NQF qualifications are seen as more portable than non-NQF qualifications	13.3%	52.0%	34.8%
Recognition (credit transfer) is given for incomplete NQF qualifications when learners move from one institution to another	12.9%	45.9%	41.2%

Table 12: Portability of qualifications (SAQA, 2005)

Possible stumbling blocks for improved credit accumulation and transfer

The NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2005) identified a number of stumbling blocks that have an effect on the portability of qualifications. Most notably these included beliefs about the quality of institutions or education sectors and entrenched institutional practices:

> Many respondents pointed to the unwillingness of certain sectors of education or training to trust the qualifications gained in other sectors. Universities did not accept technikon qualifications… although an employer said there was evidence of vertical progression from technikons to universities. Technikons were said not to accept private-provider qualifications. Academic qualifications were viewed as superior to training qualifications (SAQA, 2005:46).

Other inhibiting factors that were identified included (2005:46):

- the drive for profit by educational institutions
- the 50% residency clause that inhibited transfer of credits between institutions for more than 50% of credits already attained at the first institution
- modular versus semester systems
- the practice of re-assessing students on entry
- differences in syllabus content or length of study
- continuing limitations of portability of qualifications between universities

It is apparent from the list above that most of the factors that have a negative influence on improved portability, and therefore also effective credit accumulation and transfer, are of a systemic and localised nature entrenched through many years of function within a disparate system where some intuitions were privileged above others. Aspects of current legislation, particularly the residency clause, also

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limit credit transfer. On the global front the increased commodification of education and training (and the associated neo-liberal influences) cannot be ignored either.

Recent developments that support improved credit accumulation and transfer

The stumbling blocks to improved credit accumulation and transfer are not new, with some having already been addressed. As this exploratory investigation on CAT does not warrant a detailed discussion on each of these developments, they are only briefly listed below to allow the reader the opportunity to read more if needed:

- development of level descriptors for levels 5 to 10 (1 to 4 have already been completed)
- investigating the possibility of registering only generic qualifications on the NQF, with the specialisations only being recorded as an administrative process
- standardised groups of credits (e.g. 20 credit modules) used in non-unit standard-based qualifications
- the inclusion of "professional" qualifications on the NQF
- development of communities of trust and continued stakeholder involvement
- implementation of RPL
- simplification of assessment and quality assurance
- continued emphasis on the autonomy of institutions

Recommendations for the implementation of credit accumulation and transfer in the context of the South African NQF

Despite being outside the scope of the exploratory investigation by SAQA, a number of recommendations for the implementation of a CAT system within the South African NQF seem very apparent from the preceding discussions. As a result these are briefly listed below, but are offered as being only tentative, requiring more research before they can be implemented:

Develop communities of trust: It is generally acknowledged that NQF development and implementation is critically dependent on well-functioning communities of trust – sometimes also referred to as communities of practice or zones of mutual trust. A fully functioning CAT system in an NQF will be equally dependent on trust between stakeholder communities. In South Africa the legacy of distrust left by years of domination will not be addressed without concerted effort and significant resources.

Undertake extensive consultation: Closely related to the development of communities of trust, it is evident from the international examples that continued and extensive consultation is required, particularly to ensure effective credit transfer between different intuitions on different levels and sometimes even in different sectors.

Follow an incremental approach: Here again, it is evident that the development of a CAT system and an NQF are more successful if developed in a step-by-step approach. Although it is recognised that South Africa did not have the luxury of following an incremental approach in 1994, it does seem that now as the system is maturing it may be possible to be less hasty.

Develop a credit matrix: The successful implementation of the NQF depends to no small degree on the ease with which stakeholders can use the information captured on the NLRD. The establishment of a credit matrix (initially within specific fields of learning and areas of responsibility) could encourage the use of the NQF and improve understanding of an outcomes-based approach. A credit accumulation and transfer system as reflected in a credit matrix could facilitate:

- the development of a mechanism whereby portability and credit transfer are enhanced
- quality assurance and the building of communities of trust are enhanced
- uptake of unit standards and qualifications by providers in different sectors
- identification of possible overlaps between fields of learning and the streamlining of unit standards and qualifications to meet a broader need (i.e. broader than a single provider/sector) whereby an outcomes-based approach to education and training is made explicit and 'real', and the review and streamlining of unit standards and qualifications
- alignment of initiatives with other stakeholders, e.g. the DoE and DoL

Investigate alternative ways in which credits can be grouped **-** The current restrictions that allow only credits associated with separate unit standards or complete qualifications to be transferred require serious attention. The development of the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) Vocational by the DoE may offer some insight into such alternatives.

Summary

This investigation has shown without any doubt that the South African NQF is not a CAT system, nor does it include a fully functional CAT system as yet. The investigation has also shown that despite this current state of affairs, which includes a number of potential stumbling blocks, evidence suggests that the NQF does provide the basic framework wherein the development of a CAT system can be actively pursued in South Africa.

Component 3.3 Assessment methods and procedures

3.3.a) Describe the assessment arrangements. Who carries out assessments, and with what type of approaches? Who validates the results of the assessments? How long will the assessment procedures take? If methods or procedures vary depending on sectors, list the name of the sectors and the methods used for the recognition for the sector. What assessment procedures do participants go through to get their non-formal and informal learning recognised? Describe different stages.

3.3.b) Describe different types of assessment methods and procedures. Provide data on advantages and challenges for the different types of assessment (e.g. competence-based assessment, summative assessment, portfolio assessment, etc.) What are the principle drivers of costs of different types of assessments to different actors? Provide evidence, if any, of certain types of assessment may become beneficial or a barrier to participants (e.g. psychological, financial, etc.).

3.3.c) Describe the current relationship between academic standards, professional standards, and occupational standards in your country. Who owns and controls such standards?

3.3.d) Has the issue been raised in your county of how the assessment practice should be balanced with the right of individuals to have their learning completely independent of assessment and recognition processes be retained? Describe the

Methods and processes of assessment

This section is an extract from a guideline document produced by SAQA (2004:54-66). The purpose of the document is to enhance the implementation of RPL in South Africa.

In the assessment of prior non-formal and informal learning, the quality of assessment 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) thus 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 learned skills a long time ago. How current certain knowledge, skills and competencies need to be depends largely 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
- 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. 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.

METHODS AND PROCESSES OF ASSESSMENT			
Assessment is a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgments 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.			
	Yes	No	Underdeveloped
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, etc.)			
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[14]			
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			

Table 13: Example of the self-audit tool: methods and processes of assessment (SAQA, 2002)

It is through the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge that decisions are made regarding the learning of a person seeking credits against registered unit standards and qualifications. Valid, reliable and practical assessments ensure the integrity of an RPL system and could enhance assessment practice generally.

In the words of the SAQA RPL policy:

> 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 and qualifications. The difference lies in the route to the assessment (SAQA, 2002:8).

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[14] 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).

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Purpose and expectations

The purposes of RPL should be defined. This should be captured in the RPL policy of the institution/provider. This purpose (or combination of purposes) must however be made very clear to the candidate claiming credits towards unit standards and qualifications. There is, for example, the mistaken perception that if a person has a number of years' experience and has completed a number of short courses, these could be combined to make up a qualification. The candidate should clearly understand that if the learning achieved through such experience and through the attendance of short learning programmes meets the requirements of a registered unit standard and/or qualification, then credits could be awarded – credits are awarded for learning, not for time spent in a particular environment. In addition, credits are always awarded through some or other form of assessment and are not awarded ad hoc. The SAQA RPL policy makes it clear that the process of RPL is about:

- identifying what the candidate 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
- crediting the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past (SAQA, 2002:7)

It is therefore important for a candidate to be clear on what the purpose of RPL at the institution/provider will be, i.e. access, advanced standing and/or formal certification. This means that the candidate must know whether a formal, valid certificate will be issued, or whether he or she will be granted access to a formal learning programme based on the assessment of his or her prior learning and most importantly, know what the status of such credits is. Institutions and workplaces implementing RPL must, in their planning, be clear on the following questions:

- Will these credits be transferable intra-institutionally and/or inter-institutionally?
- Will a candidate be able to use a transcript of such credits for employment or promotion purposes?
- Will an academic record be issued?
- What is the value of credits awarded?

If such matters are not clarified from the outset, candidates may feel deceived and may question the integrity and validity of the system.

The form, quality and sources of evidence

The form, quality and sources of evidence that will lead to the attainment of credits will depend on the purpose, outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit standards and qualifications. It is therefore critical that would-be implementers of RPL be clear on what kinds of evidence will be required to offer proof of knowledge and skills in relation to the target qualification. Implementers should also be open to taking into account evidence that does not exactly match the formal requirements for the qualification.

However, as stated in the SAQA RPL policy:

> Quality of evidence relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency. Particularly in RPL assessment, the latter two issues of

quality 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) and thus make 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 that the minimum requirements for learners in full-time study (SAQA, 2002:24).

With this in mind, evidence of skills, knowledge and values may be in the form of:

- certificates from previous education and training courses, including short learning programmes and skills programmes
- licences to practice
- professional registration
- products of any nature relevant to the courses offered at the institution: art portfolios; publications, etc.
- samples of completed work
- employment-related documents such as résumés, performance appraisals, etc.
- statutory declaration outlining previous types of work and experience
- references from current and past employers, supervisors and colleagues
- testimonials from persons holding relevant qualifications in the area being assessed
- photographs of completed work certified by a referee or accompanied by a statutory declaration
- if self-employed in the past, evidence of running a business using the skills and knowledge being claimed (Mays, 2002 in SAQA, 2003)

The examples given above represent a number of static forms of evidence that could, once authenticated (and therefore assessed), be accepted as proof of applied knowledge. However, not all candidates will be able to produce such a range of evidence and additional forms of evidence may be required. The following table represents a number of assessment methods that can be used for RPL. Some of these methods could be used for authentication of evidence produced, but will also provide proof of learning where evidence set out in the list above cannot be produced:

Assessment methods	Purposes and examples
Interviews	To clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning. May be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important. (May be structured or unstructured).
Debate	To confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject.
Presentation	To check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience.
Performance testing	To test applications of theory in a structured context in correct/safe manner.
Examination	To test concepts and basic skills and applications using practical examples.
Oral examination	To check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms.

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Essay	To check the quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of the ideas.
Examples of work done or performed or designed	To check the quality of work, relevance to credit sought and authenticity of production.
Portfolio	To validate applicant's learning by providing a collection of materials that reflect prior learning and achievements. Will include own work, reflections on own practice and indirect evidence from others that are qualified to comment. The portfolio will identify relevant connection between learning and the specified or unspecified credit sought.
Book review	To ensure currency and analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level.
Annotated literature review	To illustrate the range of reading done by the applicant and ensure appropriate coverage to fulfil subject requirements.
Special projects	May be used to meet a variety of purposes – to add greater currency to knowledge of skills, to extend scope of prior learning.
Reports, critiques, articles	To indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in the current debate on the subject.

Table 14: Assessment methods for RPL (Cohen in Harris, 2000:148-149)

These examples are not exhaustive but are useful guidelines for the development of assessment methodologies when dealing with RPL.

It should be clear that RPL practitioners have a range of valid forms of assessment to choose from when making decisions about their preferred assessment methodologies. However, it is important to remember that assessments should be fit-for-purpose and a particular assessment tool should not be used where there are more efficient and practical ways to assess.

Candidate support

The SAQA RPL policy is explicit on this particular part of the RPL process:

> the danger of underestimating the levels of disempowerment and dislocation that decades of discriminatory education and training practices had on ordinary citizens, and the unfamiliarity with formal academic study, (particularly in higher education), cannot be ignored. Therefore the support services [to RPL candidates] 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 (SAQA, 2002:20).

Learner-centredness is a key principle underpinning the NQF. Translated into candidate support, it means that advisory or other support services may need to

be developed to complement the processes where appropriate evidence is identified and benchmarked and to support candidates in the preparation and planning for assessment. The extent of such support services will depend on the context. It may be possible, for example, for current student services offered by providers to offer pre-entry advice, educational planning services and post-assessment guidance. However, where necessary, additional support must be made available.

Candidate support will also include the extent to which candidates are able to choose assessment methodologies that they feel most comfortable with. This does not mean that such alternative methodologies are in any way inferior, but that they may be less threatening to the candidate. The candidate does not have an open choice of assessment methods, but alternatives to a particular method could be provided (i.e. instead of a major project, a number of smaller assignments, culminating in the achievement of the outcome, could be used, or rather than using a formal written examination, an oral examination could be used).

The assessment process and appeals procedures

A generic assessment process is illustrated in Figure 11.

Application for RPL
↓
Screening to ascertain viability of application
↓
Pre-assessment stage:

- Identification of skills and knowledge
- Matching of skills and knowledge in relation to registered unit standards and qualifications
- Assessment plan, including assessment instruments
- Guidance on the collection and presentation of evidence

↓
Assessment stage:

A structured process for gathering evidence, e.g. practical demonstration, knowledge test etc.

↓
Judgement stage:

Evidence is judged, i.e. meets the requirements for the practical demonstration, marks the test etc.

↓
Moderation stage:

Assessment instruments, processes and results are moderated

↓
Feedback

Figure 11: Generic assessment process

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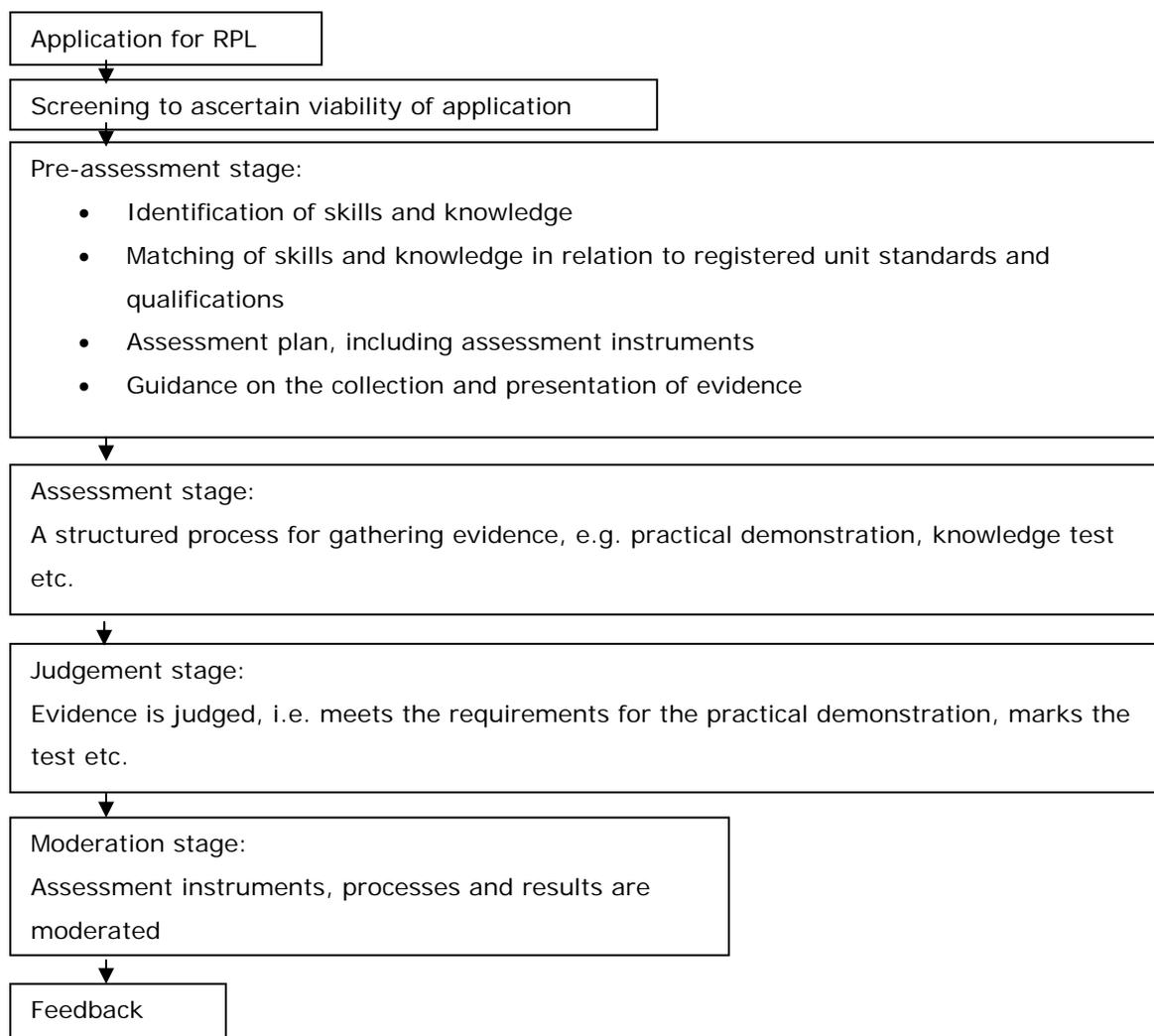
The suggested generic process in the SAQA RPL policy is explained below. All assessments should therefore encapsulate the following basic processes:

The Preparatory phase

In the preparatory phase, practitioners (including people responsible for advising and for assessing) are required to familiarise themselves with unit standards and qualifications that they will be assessing. This includes understanding very clearly the purpose, outcomes, assessment criteria and other relevant information that will impact on the design of the assessment instrument.

During this phase, the practitioner makes decisions about the most appropriate assessment methods, instruments, type and amount of evidence required and alternative methods which may emanate from discussions with candidates. It is also during this phase that moderation of the assessment methods and instruments takes place. Moderation could take place through discussions with other specialists in the area. The type and extent of pre-assessment, assessment and post-assessment support for candidates are decided and described.

The Assessment phase

The assessment phases again are divided into four stages:

- The planning for assessment: The practitioner informs the candidate about the requirements, discusses the forms and type of evidence required, and reaches agreements on the assessment instruments to be used, the standard and level of performance expected. The practitioner highlights the support structures in place to assist the candidate in the collection of evidence. The candidate is also informed about the provider's appeals process should that be required. At this point, the assessor and the candidate may choose to use alternative forms of assessment, where appropriate.
- The assessment: The assessment is conducted in an appropriate and enabling environment.
- The judgement: A judgement is made in accordance with the pre-agreed criteria.
- Feedback: Feedback includes a discussion of the results of the assessment, guidance, further planning and post-assessment support (if required).

An appeals process could be initiated at this stage. The structure and procedures of the institution/provider should be available. A generic appeals process is discussed in the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (SAQA, 2001). Consider the flow diagram in Figure 12:
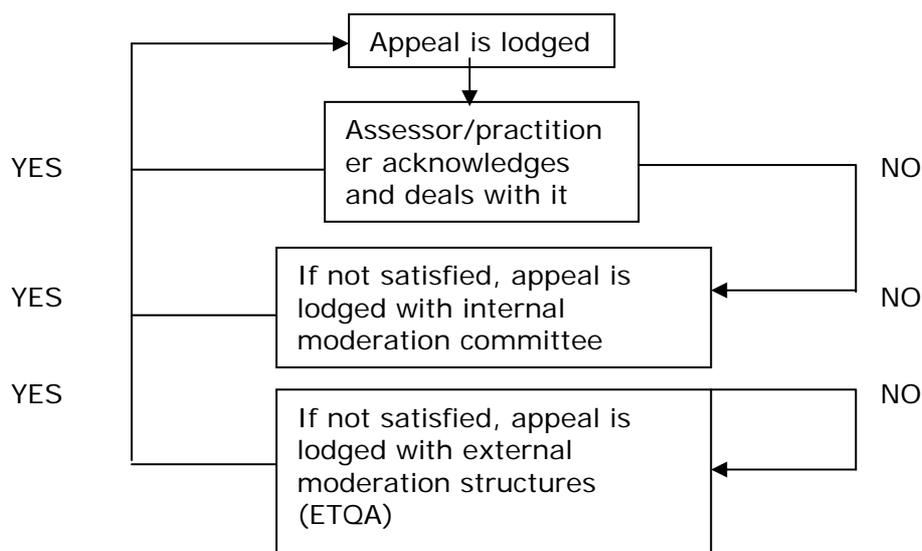
Figure 12: An appeals procedure

A working example

RPL will take place in a variety of contexts. It is therefore impossible to include examples of all the different environments. However, an approach to the establishment of assessment methods and instruments may be generalised. This section explores a process that will facilitate decisions on what should be assessed when a person requests RPL, and how the assessment(s) could take place. It starts off with the broadest possible understanding of what a qualification should enable learners to do, and then progressively moves towards an understanding of the area of specialisation that will tell practitioners in that particular field of learning that a candidate has met all (or some) of the requirements for the qualification.

Each institution/provider will have its own learning programme that will progressively assist learners to achieve the overall purpose of the qualification. The extent to which such learning programmes differ between institutions/providers, will facilitate or inhibit the award of credits towards a particular qualification and the subsequent transfer of such credits intra-institutionally and inter-institutionally. However, it should be noted that a registered qualification does not contain the learning programme of a particular provider, but rather contains a broad description of what a learner can expect to be able to do on successful completion. Where the point of departure is the outcomes or results of learning, rather than the actual input in terms of the learning programme, establishing equivalence, rather than literal matching with subjects and modules, will become possible (Heyns, 2004). To describe the approach, a hypothetical qualification (BCom Tourism Management) will be used.

The 'nested' approach to standard generation and qualifications specification

The 'nested' approach to standards generation and qualifications specification in the draft *New Academic Policy* (CHE, 2001:45), is useful to understand the *broadest to narrowest* approach. This approach was not developed with RPL in mind, but could be helpful in the establishment of what should be assessed when RPL is requested. Consider Figure 13:
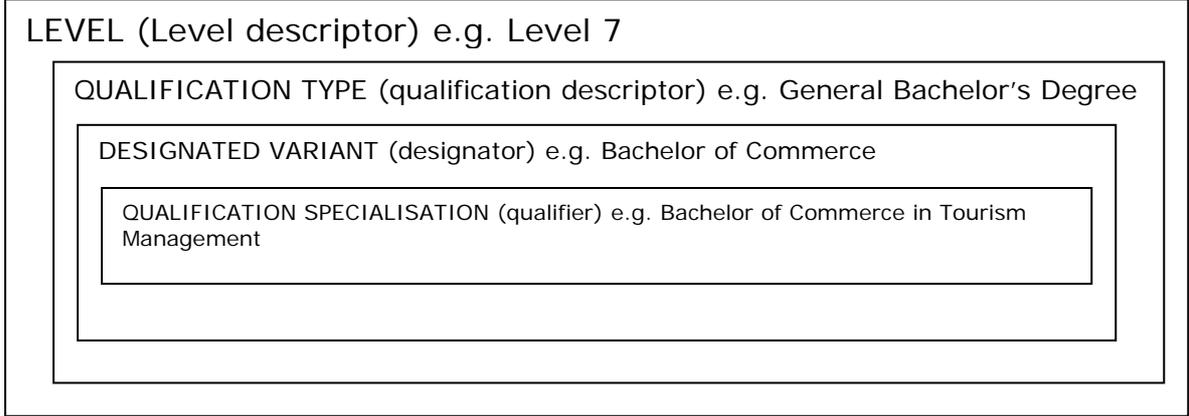
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ LEVEL (Level descriptor) e.g. Level 7                                     │
│  ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐    │
│  │ QUALIFICATION TYPE (qualification descriptor) e.g. General        │    │
│  │ Bachelor's Degree                                                 │    │
│  │  ┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐  │    │
│  │  │ DESIGNATED VARIANT (designator) e.g. Bachelor of Commerce   │  │    │
│  │  │  ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐  │  │    │
│  │  │  │ QUALIFICATION SPECIALISATION (qualifier) e.g.         │  │  │    │
│  │  │  │ Bachelor of Commerce in Tourism Management            │  │  │    │
│  │  │  └──────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘  │  │    │
│  │  └────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘  │    │
│  └──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘    │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 13: Nested approach to standards generation and qualifications specification

Level descriptor

The description of what a learner should be able to do at Level 7 of the NQF, i.e. at the achievement of a first degree, is as follows:

Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:	
a. a well-rounded and systematic knowledge base in one or more disciplines/fields and a detailed knowledge of some specialist areas b. an informed understanding of one or more discipline's/field's terms, rules, concepts, principles and theories; an ability to map new knowledge onto a given body of theory; an acceptance of a multiplicity of 'right' answers c. effective selection and application of a discipline's/field's essential procedures, operations and techniques; an understanding of the central methods of enquiry in a discipline/field; a knowledge of at least one other discipline's/field's mode of enquiry d. an ability to deal with unfamiliar concrete and abstract problems and issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments e. well-developed information retrieval skills; critical analysis and synthesis of quantitative and/or qualitative data; presentation skills following prescribed formats, using IT skills effectively f. an ability to present and communicate information and opinions in well-structured arguments, showing an awareness of audience and using academic/professional discourse appropriately	a capacity to operate in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts, requiring responsibility and initiative; a capacity to self-evaluate and identify and address own learning needs; an ability to interact effectively in a learning group

Table 15: NQF Level 7 level descriptor

A careful consideration of the level, breadth and depth of learning required at a first degree level, hints at what things should be assessed to determine whether a candidate meets the requirements for credits on this level. These include:

- detailed knowledge of the area of specialisation
- familiarity with the area of specialisation's terms, rules, concepts and principles
- application of the area of specialisation's procedures, operations and techniques
- the ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts
- IT and information retrieval skills
- presentation and communication skills

In addition, it is expected that a successful learner at this level will take responsibility for his or her learning and to reflect on his or her own practices.

Moving down into the next level requires considering the qualification type, in this case a General Bachelor's Degree.

Qualification type

The description of what a learner is expected to be able to do at the level of a General Bachelor's Degree is captured as follows in the NAP discussion document (CHE, 2001:119):

> The purpose of the General Bachelor's Degree is to develop graduates who have benefited from a well-rounded, broad education and who can fully demonstrate the capabilities described in the Level 7 descriptor, including the demonstration of initiative and responsibility in an academic or professional context. A Bachelor's Degree programme in the General Track consists of at least one major or cumulative specialisation, and some exposure to other disciplines. This means that graduates should have studied at least one discipline/field progressively throughout the programme to the point where they have attained some depth of knowledge and expertise in the area, as well as gaining a broad comparative knowledge.

As in the case of the Level Descriptors for Level 7 of the NQF, the above qualification description indicates what should be assessed, in particular:

- the extent to which a candidate is conversant in an area of specialisation, e.g. Management in the Tourism industry.

It also gives an indication of the relative weighting that should be given to the different parts of the qualification, i.e. the 'majors' will carry more weight in terms of the overall assessment than the 'other disciplines' learners are exposed to in attaining the qualification.

Designated variant

The designated variant makes it possible to determine and define articulation possibilities. All degrees known as 'Bachelor of Commerce', for example, will have as their core learning, subjects/modules dealing with economic and business sciences. Where credits are awarded for this part of the qualification, an RPL candidate could articulate those credits with a number of qualifications in and outside of the institution/provider. (The structure of a qualification, as described in the National Standards Bodies (NSB) Regulations, will also assist in determining the relative importance of a particular part of a qualification in terms

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of its credit values and levels of attainment). Consider the example used in Chapter 2 of this document for a BCom Management degree:

```
┌──────────────┐                              ┌──────────────────┐
│ BCom         │      Core generic knowledge  │ BCom (Economic   │
│ (Management) │──────articulates with:       │ sciences)        │
└──────────────┘                              └──────────────────┘
                                              ┌──────────────────┐
                                              │ BCom (Financial  │
                                              │ Accounting)      │
                                              └──────────────────┘
```
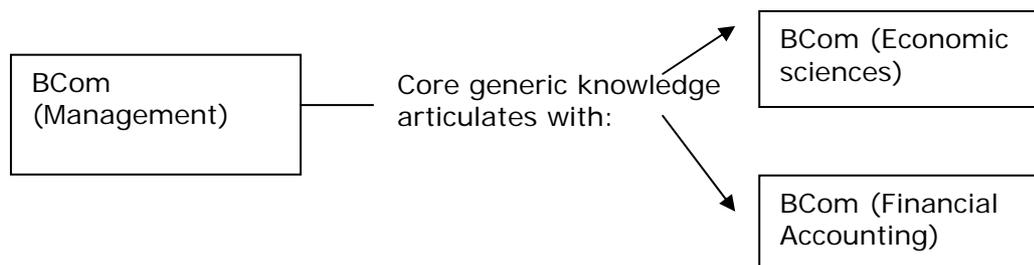
Figure 14: Example of a designated variant

Qualification specialisation

The qualification specialisation is the final level of the 'nested approach'. By understanding how the qualification fits into an overall structure, and the type, breadth and depth of learning required to achieve a qualification at a particular level, a holistic and integrated approach to assessment of prior learning can be developed. In terms of the hypothetical qualification used as an example, the purpose, exit-level outcomes and associated assessment criteria will inform the detail of the assessment within the broader conceptualisation of a qualification at this level. The purpose for this qualification could read:

Bachelor of Commerce: Tourism Management

> **Purpose:**
> The overall purpose of this qualification is to develop future managers and entrepreneurs in the tourism sphere.

The exit level outcome(s) for this qualification could read:

> **Exit level outcome(s):**
> After completion of the BCom (Tourism Management) programme the graduate will have the competence to operate and/or manage any of the key functional areas of a tourism business and be in the position to become an entrepreneur in the tourism sphere.

The purpose and exit level outcome(s) highlight the core of the qualification, i.e. management and entrepreneurship. Assessment should therefore focus, in keeping with the level, breadth and depth of learning required for this level of qualification, on the ability to manage and the entrepreneurial skills of the candidate. The assessment of these aspects will carry the most weight in terms of the overall assessment.

In order to establish what should be assessed to determine whether the candidate meets the requirements for the qualification, the first question should be:

How will practitioners/assessors know that a person can manage key functional areas of a tourism business?

In the example in Chapter 2 of this document, some answers emerge:

Management of a business includes:

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- *consideration of market forces: feasibility studies; market research.*
- *fiscal management: budgeting and planning.*
- *business plan: strategic vision of now and the future, etc.*

The second question, in terms of this qualification could be:

How will practitioners/assessors know that a person is in the position to become an entrepreneur in the tourism sphere?

Possible answers emerging from this question are:

Entrepreneurial abilities include:

- *The identification of a niche market*
- *The identification of the resources and tools required to start a business in the tourism sphere*
- *The development of marketing material and tools*
- *The implementation of a marketing strategy, etc.*

Once practitioners understand clearly what within the framework of the qualification would constitute applied knowledge, decisions regarding assessment methods and instruments can be made. The following table takes this example further:

What is to be assessed?	Possible assessment instruments	Links to the qualification descriptor	Links to the level descriptor
The ability to **manage**, i.e. Fiscal management Drawing up a budget Resource management Business plan etc.	Portfolio of evidence containing authenticated documents proving competence in management Projects, e.g. to draw up a business plan Assignments, e.g. to indicate how resources will be managed Case studies, e.g. how knowledge could be applied in unfamiliar contexts Challenge examination, e.g. to assess underpinning theoretical knowledge of economic and business sciences	The extent to which a candidate is conversant in an area of specialisation, e.g. Management in the Tourism industry	Detailed knowledge of the area of specialisation; Familiarity with the area of specialisation's terms, rules, concepts and principles Application of the area of specialisation's procedures, operations and techniques The ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts
Entrepreneurial abilities, i.e. Identification of target market	A major project including the assessment of all the aspects	The extent to which a candidate is conversant in an	Detailed knowledge of the area of specialisation;

The identification of resources and tools to start a business The development of a marketing strategy etc.	mentioned Portfolio of evidence with authenticated documents proving competence; Presentation e.g. of a marketing plan Challenge examination, e.g. to assess underpinning knowledge of marketing	area of specialisation, e.g. Entrepreneurship	Familiarity with the area of specialisation's terms, rules, concepts and principles Application of the area of specialisation's procedures, operations and techniques The ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts Presentation and communication skills
Other requirements, e.g. Knowledge of the tourism sphere IT usage and retrieval of information Experiential learning in a tourism business	Challenge examination, e.g. to assess knowledge of historical and/or cultural and natural sites suitable for tourism Industry-based certificates, e.g. for IT skills Logbooks e.g. for practical experience in a workplace Testimonials and references in terms of work responsibilities	Exposure to other related disciplines	IT and information retrieval skills

Table 16: Possible assessment instruments

Once the practitioner has decided which assessment instruments to use, the level and extent of support that may be required by the candidates also becomes clear. A Portfolio of Evidence, for example, is a very common method used internationally for RPL. However, putting together a portfolio is in itself a hard-won skill, particularly if it relates to reflecting on one's own practices. If a Portfolio of Evidence is the most appropriate form of assessment, then the necessary support to develop such a portfolio must be built into the support structures for applicants.

The example discussed above is by no means complete; instead it attempts to facilitate the development of an approach for RPL practice – both for qualifications based on unit standards and for qualifications not based on unit standards.

This approach will also facilitate inter-institutional and/or regional collaboration because the focus is on the outcome or results of learning. This in turn will

greatly facilitate the articulation and transfer of credits intra- and inter-institutionally (Heyns, 2003).

In addition, this approach is useful not only for RPL practice, but could increasingly be used for curriculum development.

Component 3.4 Others

3.4.a) Provide any other technical arrangements that you think are the most important characteristics that exist in your country, which have not been addressed in above Component 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

Component 4: Stakeholder behaviour

Component 4.1 Characteristics of stakeholders

4.1.a) Identify all possible stakeholders involved (with specific characteristics) and complete a list below concerning non-formal learning and informal learning in your country to complement the list for Component 2.2. The 2.2 list is to map out governance and the role of government while this list aims to map out the relationships between providers of non-formal learning or types of informal learning, recognisers of such learning, recognition to be received, regulation of such recognition, and main users of such recognition. Please note, due to the difference of nature of non-formal and informal learning, that the grid for non-formal learning uses a provider of non-formal learning or an input-side as a starting base - first column – as non-formal learning seems to be more recognised after going through a non-formal learning programme. On the other hand, the grid for informal learning uses output/ skills as a starting point because it is not feasible to list all types of informal learning where there is no such supplier as the individual is the active entity to create such learning opportunities. Therefore, there is a separate grid for non-formal and informal learning. The annex also aims to examine characteristics of users for aggregation of data, but please provide micro-level data about users in this section.

4.2.a) has been addressed elsewhere. However, institutions have opted for different approaches in keeping with the purpose of RPL within a particular sector, as reflected in the Table 17:

The purpose of RPL within the sector

The purpose could include access and appropriate placement at a particular level at the institution, granting advanced status, advanced standing and crediting and certifying learners for the parts of the qualification where all the requirements have been met, or a combination of these depending on the context. It should also be noted that the NSB Regulations (RSA, 1998a) make it clear that a learner could achieve a qualification in part or wholly through the process of RPL.

The following descriptions of the abovementioned options may be helpful:

Term	Description
Access	To provide ease of entry to the appropriate level of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression
Placement	To determine, through a diagnostic assessment, the appropriate level for learners wanting to enter education and training
Advanced status	To grant access to a level of a qualification higher than the logical next level following on the preceding qualification
Advanced standing	To award credits towards a qualification for which a candidate has registered
Credit	To award formal, transferable credits to the learning that meets the requirements of the part or full qualification
Certification	To certify credits attained for purposes of a qualification

Table 17: Purposes of RPL

The purpose of RPL within a particular sector would be closely linked to the target market and target area. The target market refers to those candidates that the institution and/or its ETQA, wants to attract. (In the Faculty of Education, for example, the target market may be under-qualified teachers.) The target market could be determined in a number of ways – the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) may inform the process either in terms of a 'redress'-approach or a 'critical shortage of skills'-approach. The Services SETA, for example, identified a need for RPL with domestic workers against a newly developed qualification in this area (SAQA, 2003).

Component 4.2 Access

> 4.2.a) What are the eligibilities to go through the recognition process? If it differs in different sectors/levels (e.g. HE, VET, upper secondary, basic education, professional, etc.), describe different eligibilities for different levels/sectors.
>
> 4.2.b) How many educational institutions (in comparison with the total number of educational institutions) at different levels practise the recognition of non-formal and informal learning as an admission policy?
>
> 4.2.c) Describe the situation of access to information and communication. Is there one-stop information service centre or help-desk concerning questions which may arise about the recognition system? What medium has been used (leaflet, CD-ROM, website, etc)? If there is a website, please provide the figure of 'click ratio (how many clicks per month – please provide all the records available since the launch of the website.').Attach an example. What media channels have been used to publicise the existence of such medium (newspaper, journals, free journals, publicity on the metro, etc)? Specify the names of such media channels.

4.2.b) Addressed elsewhere. In principle, all education and training institutions should have RPL policies and procedures in place. However, a limited number of higher education institutions and private providers have implemented RPL to any great (and systemic) extent. Where RPL has been implemented across an institution, information is captured in extensive leaflets etc.

Component 4.3 Participation

> 4.3.a) How many people have actually taken up the process at different educational levels? Provide any evidence on the patterns of participants (gender, age, socio-economic groups, ethnicity, employment status, marital status, educational levels and their family educational levels).
>
> 4.3.b) Provide details of any survey – national household survey, user survey, etc. – that explains any linkage of the background of participants and the uptake of the recognition process.
>
> 4.3.c) Provide evidence, if any, that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning worked as an innovative pathway for disadvantaged groups to get on the 'learning leads to learning' and 'training leads to training' track ? Who constitutes the 'disadvantaged group' in your country?

Data for numbers of people who have participated is not yet readily available, except directly from the ETQA responsible for the implementation of RPL in a particular sector. This is for two reasons: (1) in many cases, the ETQAs responsible for the upload of such information to the NLRD, have struggled to meet the requirements of batch uploads; (2) a principled decision has been made

that certificates issued to successful RPL candidates will not indicate that they have achieved credits through RPL. This is to ensure that such candidates are not discriminated against in terms of employment or further learning opportunities. However, the intention is that such data is made available in fields for upload of data.

Component 4.4 Incentives and disincentives

4.4.a) Provide evidence of any, if not all, that the recognition of non-formal and informal learning functions as a transitional or multi-directional pathway in your country (e.g. a way to further studies, shorten study period, find a job, change a job, get a better salary, etc.) If it functions as a way to find a job from the unemployment status, is there any evidence that the length of unemployment influences the transition.

4.4.b) Provide evidence, if any, of detailed case studies where the actual length of studies was shortened by their recognition of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. number of such cases, the maximum and minimum reduced length and, thus, the costs of the study, the most practised subject areas, etc.)

4.4.c) Provide data, if any, of the returns of investments for different stakeholders. Any evidence of better private returns of investment (e.g. earnings) afterwards? Any evidence of fiscal returns? Any evidence of recognition that this type of learning contributes to democracy and citizenship as social outcome of learning?

4.4.d) Provide data, if any, of practices of fiscal incentives for employers (e.g. tax incentives).

4.4.e) Has the government made an explicit statement about promoting equity and social cohesion by using the recognition of non-formal and informal learning? If so, what kinds of schemes exist?

4.4.f) Describe a situation in your country if stigmatisation exists for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning (as opposed to the formal recognition) in the academic word and/or in the labour market? If yes, have there been any attempts to change such effects and to increase up-take of such recognition? What strategies have been tested so far?

4.4.g) Describe any incentives or levers that promoted public-private partnership in the recognition practices in the labour market? What schemes or incentives exist to encourage SMEs to engage in the recognition arrangements?

In South Africa, given its legacy of an education and training system rooted in an apartheid ideology, there is a widespread belief that RPL is completely central to the goals of redress of past unfair education and training practices and improved access to further and higher education. In two studies, undertaken by SAQA on the impact of the NQF on the transformation of education and training in this country[15], it became evident that while there were some encouraging examples of good practice, in the view of most respondents to the study, progress is too slow.

In Cycle 2 of the NQF Impact Study, (SAQA, 2005:54-58), most respondents associated the NQF objective of 'accelerate the redress of past unfair

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[15] NQF Impact Study Cycle 1: *Establish the criteria against which to measure progress of the NQF* (SAQA, 2004b); NQF Impact Study Cycle 2: *Establish a baseline against which to measure progress* (SAQA, 2005).

discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities' with a system whereby prior experiential learning could be recognised in terms of formal registered national qualifications.

The responses to a series of questions related to 'redress of past unfair practices' are summarised in Table 18 (the table reflects quantitative responses, while qualitative responses are captured in the following section):

	Disagree/ strongly disagree	Agree/ strongly agree	Don't know/ too soon
Learners obtain credits towards NQF qualifications through the recognition of prior learning (RPL)	12.4%	61.9%	25.7%
Learners are granted access to further and higher education and training institutions whether or not they have a matriculation certificate and/or other formal entry requirements	21.2%	53.6%	25.3%
Eligible employees are promoted even if they do not have a matriculation certificate	25.0%	44.2%	30.9%
Systems and procedures for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) are available for learners	20.2%	52.2%	27.6%
Education and training institutions implement measures to facilitate the redress of past unfair practices	10.5%	64.9%	24.7%

Table 18: Redress practices, including RPL (SAQA, 2005)

While almost two-thirds of the respondents (61.9%) indicated that learners can obtain credits towards NQF qualifications through RPL, slightly more than half (53.6%) believed that learners were granted access to further and higher education and training institutions without a matriculation certificate and/or other formal entry requirements.

Interview respondents supported the quantitative results and indicated that the matriculation certification (school-leaving certificate) is still a major barrier to RPL and redress – particularly in terms of entry to higher education. They also noted that, in their view, matriculation is not a reliable indicator of success in higher education, but without matriculation as a minimum, it is difficult to get employment. An education and training institution argued that a matriculation certificate should no longer be the sole criterion for entry to a higher education learning programmes – experience should also be recognised. In the respondents' view, even learners who have attained matriculation certificates seem to find it difficult to access higher education programmes. Learners are often required to do a foundation programme before they gain entry to the qualification.

Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of support for the idea of RPL. RPL is seen to be giving recognition to learners with extensive experience in order to gain access to further and higher education and training, particularly for those learners who did not have the opportunities to gain entry to education and training in the past. Currently, it is felt that experience is not taken into account in formal learning environments.

However, one ETQA indicated that it has had very few requests for RPL - only for unit standards achieved through a City and Guilds certificate (United Kingdom) offered by a South African technical college.

Other issues inhibiting the implementation of RPL seem to include a bias towards academic learning. A departmental official, for example, mentioned that RPL 'can't replace academic qualifications', but that it does have a place in education and training.

A higher education institution noted with concern that with the capping of enrolments in higher education, access to learning programmes through RPL may become more difficult.

A respondent noted that without adequate funding incentives, redress might not take place.

However, many positive comments about RPL were received. A provider in the HET sector reported that there was a dedicated RPL post in the institution. One DoE respondent noted that "a few [higher education institutions] are already implementing RPL as some form of entry assessment". An ETQA respondent said:

> The [Universities of Technology have] very strong RPL departments – we are referring people for qualifications to them. What we are actually saying [to learners] is that you now have a choice and you have to price [the institutions] and… make a comparison.

Providers referred to a number of examples of RPL initiatives at various stages of development. However, others suggested that RPL systems were not yet in place, that there was a lack of understanding of RPL on the ground and that processes needed to be simplified. Another said that "the people who need it most are those who can least afford it". It was also suggested that RPL candidates might be regarded as 'weaker' than those with conventionally-acquired qualifications.

An FET respondent was sceptical about the prospects for RPL:

> The RPL thing isn't going to work because the funding system of universities specifically relates to how long that learner spends with his bum on that seat… RPL is a short process, there is no funding mechanism to RPL. There just isn't.

Another respondent said that RPL processes were too cumbersome and paper-oriented. An HET institution reported that each faculty had an RPL quality assurance committee but that it was a 'tedious process'. This respondent referred also to a more informal process whereby some applicants without a degree but who had experience in what was thought to be an appropriate training process were admitted to a Master's degree. The implication was that academics should be trusted to undertake this process without excessive bureaucracy.

Trade unions tended to feel that RPL was not widely available to workers:

> It has been a nightmare. RPL has not been accessible to people… it was made to be a very complex procedure and a very expensive exercise.

Another said:

> It should not be an added cost… providers must provide all forms of assessment to learners, including RPL.

RPL is viewed by some respondents as a possible cost-saving mechanism, particularly if it can be undertaken instead of workplace assessment, which is seen to be slow and cumbersome – it may therefore be possible to fast-track learners through RPL procedures.

A respondent also noted that institutions seem to be much more accommodating - learners are not simply refused entry to higher education - but he voiced some doubt about the sincerity of such actions, citing the need to reflect equity of access and changes in the demographic profile of institutions.

Progress towards redress in workplaces seems to be slow – less than half of the respondents (44.2%) indicated that employees are promoted on the basis of performance and not solely on minimum qualification requirements. However, there are encouraging examples of recognition of experience:

> [Qualifications and experience are] both important but what is most important is the experience that the person has…. you might find that this person's [experience] is equal to [that of someone with] qualifications although he or she doesn't have those qualifications.

While a higher education institution indicated that they do not consider it possible to promote somebody without the requisite qualification, an FET institution indicated that experience and a 'good track record' will secure promotion. Other institutions agree – the person must be able to 'prove that [he or she] can do the job'.

Employers in particular were more concerned about experience and performance as the basis for promotion, but added that if matriculation is the minimum requirement, they would accept that. In their view, a prospective candidate could undergo an RPL assessment to determine whether he or she is eligible for promotion.

However, a trade union did not seem to be convinced:

> I don't see that. I think they [employers] may have bought into it, but they are not doing enough. When you look at some of them who are still mainly employing white people, you can see that it is not 100%.

'Redress practices' in the study were almost without exception seen as RPL and progress towards achieving the implementation of RPL is still considered slow. Most respondents indicated strong support for the principle of RPL, but between a quarter and a third of respondents (between 24.7% and 30.9%) indicated that they are unsure about the implementation of RPL, or that it is too soon to make a judgment about the impact of RPL on education and training. Nevertheless, based on the evidence, it seems there is a high level of awareness of the need to redress past injustices.

In terms of an analysis of NQF-registered qualifications of the three sectors, Physical Planning and Construction, Mining and Minerals and Hospitality, Travel, Tourism and Gaming, it became evident that while redress practice is dependent on the institution's implementation thereof, the design of qualifications consciously makes provision for RPL.

Component 4.5 Others

4.5.a) Provide any arrangements of collective bargaining that exists in your country. If there are accomplishments gained by collective bargaining for recognition of non-formal and informal learning, please provide details (driving forces, technical arrangements, beneficiaries, etc.)

4.5.b) Provide any other technical arrangements that you think are the most important characteristics that exist in your country, which have not been addressed in above Component 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

Workforce development projects

At the time of the development of the SAQA policy on RPL, in 2002, a number of pilot projects were underway. In the Metal and Engineering Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MERSETA) in South Africa, a model that is moving towards a holistic approach to RPL and related services emerged. A RPL pilot project was been undertaken in the New Tyre Chamber. This project emerged from an evaluation of an early assessor training course in which components relating to bias and sensitivity, and RPL, were inadequate. A new assessor training course, substantially inclusive of components dealing with possible assessor bias and sensitivity to adult learners, and aligned with the national unit standards for assessors, was developed. Workers were provided with time off to attend a one-day 'Returning to Learning' workshop, in addition to one-on-one guidance, to assist them in preparing for their assessments.

In 1997, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) undertook a participatory RPL research project in the automotive and mining sectors. The project is important in highlighting some of the problems that can undermine RPL implementation if not addressed in the planning and consensus-building stages. For example, it emerged that management and workers had different purposes in mind for the RPL activity (management wanted a skills audit, while workers assumed that they would receive higher pay and have access to further education and training opportunities). A number of factors contributed to workers being disillusioned with RPL: information relating to RPL procedures and assessment tools was not readily made available; some of the assessment tools used were inappropriate; many workers were given no opportunities to prepare for their assessments and nor did they have access to the standards or criteria against which they were to be assessed; many workers disregarded the outcome of their assessments, as the grading system was not explained, and no verbal feedback was provided. One of the spin-offs was that the RPL exercise mitigated against the development of a notion of lifelong learning. Also, the equity agenda so often assumed to be inherent in RPL practices did not meet the goal of certifying large numbers of workers.

The findings from the research were used to develop an RPL policy for COSATU affiliates that sets out eight areas key to implementation, including developing a union (labour) mandate, establishing a Joint Committee, agreeing on the purpose(s) of RPL, putting in place support structures for workers etc., in order to create a worker-supportive and participatory RPL framework for workplaces (COSATU, 2000).

Finally, the experience of the COSATU research, with regard to the social redress and equity agenda of RPL being undermined unless carefully designed, is an issue that has been foregrounded. It is evident that all stakeholders involved in RPL

implementation and quality assurance will need to ensure that their processes are inclusive, participatory and stakeholder-driven (SAQA, 2002).

Component 5: Case studies of benefits and barriers

Component 5.1 Economic benefits

5.1.a) Shortening the formal education process and thus reducing direct costs of learning and opportunity costs for individuals.

5.1.b) Increasing the visibility of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and thus enhancing potential benefits for future economic gains.

5.1.c) Improving the allocation of human capital within organisations by matching the appropriate demands and supplies of skills and competencies.

5.1.d) Reducing skills shortages or skills mismatch by allowing more mobility within the labour market (occupational mobility).

5.1.e) Ensuring labour force to support economic growth by the active use of the potential labour population (older workers, women, immigrants, unemployed youth, etc.).

5.1.f) Ensuring labour force to support economic growth by improving productivity of the current labour force.

Component 5.2 Educational benefits

5.2.a) Reshaping the established concept of education from 'terminal education' to 'lifelong learning'.

5.2.b) Providing flexible personalised learning pathways.

5.2.c) Raising educational attainments levels by increasing the completion rates of secondary education qualifications.

5.2.d) Increasing the tertiary participation rates of non-traditional learners.

5.2.e) Improving the teacher work force through more flexible entrance to teaching occupation.

Component 5.3 Social benefits

5.3.a) Building social institutions to arrange smoother transition from education to work and from work back to education; increasing socio-cultural equity and social cohesion by providing pathways for formally excluded disadvantaged groups to be included.

5.3.b) Leading to the better societal values (e.g. promotion of democracy, intercultural understanding, better health, lower criminal rates, etc).

5.3.c) Enhancing flexibility to allow more mobility within the education and training sector (e.g. between VET and HE and from FE to HE, etc).

5.4.d) Building a stepping stone for prisoners to be re-integrated into a society.

Component 5.4 Personal benefits

5.4.a) Empowering individuals to have more control over where and when they learn.

5.4.b) Developing the aspirations of those who have 'dropped out' to resume learning and to complete a qualification.

5.4.c) Reducing the stigma of qualifications associated with non-formal and informal learning.

Component 5.5 Others

5.5.a) Describe any cases where you identify other benefits or barriers to such benefits.

This section details three case studies prepared for a guideline document commissioned by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (unpublished). It reflects many of the questions raised for the Country Background Report:

The Construction Education and Training Authority

The Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) aimed to recognise and credit workers for learning at the lowest level of the NQF (Level 1) and consequently could be classified as a 'redress' project – most of these workers have been employed as unskilled labourers in the industry.

Background to the project

The CETA conducted a three-year development project in RPL supported by the European Union (EU). It was directed towards bricklayers, carpenters, painters, plasterers, tilers and plumbers. As noted above, these workers were mainly employed as unskilled labourers in the industry. This sector was particularly characteristic of the disparate education and training policies of the past apartheid regime: black workers were not allowed access to apprenticeships, which would have qualified them as tradespeople, but can be seen as the backbone of the industry. This however did not prevent workers from picking up basic and intermediate skills within these specific areas. Some of these candidates have acquired skills over a period of 30 to 40 years without been given the opportunity to 'test' their skills base against a formalised education and training system. Moreover, some of the candidates progressed to a small contractor level without formal qualification. The project therefore aimed to redress the social and education injustices of the past. Over 8 328 persons have achieved competency awards, 7 401 males and 927 females, of which close to 92% were given an opportunity to have their prior experiential learning recognised.

Purposes

While some of the purposes were pragmatic in relation to the skills needs of the sector, the cost of training and the competitiveness of the industry, the project aimed to contribute to the personal development and status of the applicants. Some important purposes therefore included:

- Individual access to qualifications and opportunities for further learning. The need for RPL in this sector oversubscribed the final results by more than 3 000. Due to limited funding, provision was made for a maximum of 6 000 candidates.

- Improved access to employment that required qualifications. Focused post-RPL training became a necessity to fill those gaps identified during the initial RPL process. An additional 1 572 persons achieved competency awards as a result of post–RPL training. Sixty-nine persons have participated in entrepreneurial training and have been deemed competent against the relevant learning outcomes specified in those qualifications.
- Awarding formal credits in relation to qualifications. More than 12 000 achievements have been recorded against 'core' skills of the mentioned trades. To record these, a database has also been developed as an outcome of this project.
- Three qualifications were developed with the support of the project, through the legislated qualification development and approval process. The occupational areas selected were those of Construction Plasterer, Construction Tiler and Construction Painter. The project continues to support and evaluate other new qualification development and amendments to existing qualifications including Construction Carpenter, Plumbing, Bricklayer and Mason.
- Development of learning materials for the core elements of the relevant qualifications
- 27 equipped RPL locations in nine provinces of South Africa

Procedures

RPL was conducted through three core elements: advising candidates on gaining recognition, assessing learning against standards and learning outcomes, verification of the process and results. To a limited extent, this was followed by 'post-RPL training' as mentioned earlier.

Procedures included:

- an advisory phase with advisors competent and qualified in the area of specialisation and registered as advisors with the CETA
- an assessment phase, with assessors competent and qualified in the area of specialisation and registered as assessors with the CETA (652 competent RPL practitioners have been registered with the CETA ETQA)
- a verification phase by internal (at the assessment site) and external (acting on behalf of the CETA) verifiers registered with the CETA who were responsible for the quality assurance of assessment instruments and results. This was identified as a necessity as it was found that candidates will 'migrate' from one assessment centre to another to acquire further recognition of competencies. Standardised delivery had to be assured.

An important characteristic of this project was the length of time spent, and the emphasis placed, on the advisory phase. Applicants were very often illiterate or barely functionally literate and the advisory phase therefore took up almost two-thirds of the time spent on the overall process. Also, assessment tasks had to be made available in the form of pictures and diagrams and model structures (e.g. a wall) were built for reference to the task.

Candidates also found it difficult to satisfy the requirements embedded in a formalised education and training system. The time spent on each unit of learning (some of which were very small) varied between four to nine hours per unit. A major advantage of the time spent on this process was the fact that the assessor was supplied with a comprehensive Portfolio of Evidence as well as an 'award recommendation' from the adviser. This led to a reduction in the time spent by the assessor on the assessment, in some cases by more than half the time it would have taken. Economies of scale also influenced the decision to spend so much time on advisory functions as assessors are more 'expensive' than advisors.

Key characteristics

Quality assurance of all the elements of an RPL process was considered the 'foundation of RPL'. Much time and effort also went into the training of advisors, assessors and verifiers and the development of materials, assessment tools and the quality management system. The following trades, in order of uptake, were the most sought after: Bricklaying, Carpentry and Painting.

After the project

When the project commenced, a decision had to be taken to either establish assessment centres as stand-alone centres or to link them to established and already accredited training providers. The latter was chosen as the preferred option as these providers had an established infrastructure and free access to prospective candidates. Post-RPL training could also be conducted at the same site. The following benefits resulted from this decision:

- Although only 80% of the 27 established RPL centres are presently in operation, RPL is still being conducted at these sites and a whole range of candidates have achieved recognition beyond the conclusion of the project.
- The training providers that were originally involved are continuing to apply RPL principles and a reduction in training contact time and lower training costs to the provider and the industry have been reported.
- The setting up of assessment centres and RPL services mostly in existing training providers increased the economic viability of those providers.
- Those emerging providers that operated in a joint venture with more established providers have also progressed to become fully fledged accredited providers in a much shorter period of time than is generally the case.
- A substantial number of successful candidates progressed to higher qualifications. The formal recognition of skills/competencies facilitated access to other qualifications – progression and lifelong learning were enhanced.
- The RPL process contributed to the standardisation of processes and document requirements regarding assessment instruments, reporting and a standardised Portfolio of Evidence. This in turn facilitates quality assurance.
- Important information, for example information about the literacy level of candidates, emerged. This enables the sector to undertake targeted interventions in literacy, etc.

The Free State Higher Education Consortium (FSHEC)

The consortium attempts to open up access to higher education on a much larger scale than was possible under the previous government.

Background to the project

The Free State province in South Africa is the second poorest in the country. In this province the apartheid dispensation was particularly characterised by unequal distribution of resources and learning opportunities, resulting in an unequal distribution of skills levels and formal, further and higher education and training levels between the different population groups. The higher education institutions in the region made a decision to collaborate in a regional initiative in order to develop an efficient process amidst resource constraints. The aim is to redress past inequalities, improve skills levels, acknowledge other forms of learning outside formal learning and eventually to produce learners who will contribute to

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local and regional economies. This is known as the Free State Higher Education Consortium (FSHEC).

Purposes
While the FSHEC has initiated many projects on a regional basis, one of the projects is in the field of widening participation and access of learners into higher education in the Free State region. The access project consists of three sub-projects, namely:

- RPL
- entrance testing
- bridging and foundation programmes

The regional RPL project is funded by contributions of donors and membership fees of the partner institutions.

The regional project aims to offer a centralised RPL service to its partners in order to widen the participation of learners wanting to enter higher education while ensuring effectiveness, efficiency and quality.

Procedures
Initial screening, entailing an assessment of the language proficiency and mathematical literacy needed for success in higher education, is conducted by the RPL regional office.

On completion of the above, an assessment plan is drawn up with the partner institution's subject-matter specialists. The assessment plan is the backbone of the assessment process and details the following:

- the learning outcomes to be assessed. This may encapsulate the outcomes for a full award such as a diploma or a degree to enable advanced standing or access to a higher level programme, or for a unit of learning such as a subject area or module, for which credit exemption is granted.
- the specific criteria to be used to assess the learning
- the evidence required as proof of the learning
- the assessment method, which could include any or any combination of the following:
    - Portfolio of Evidence
    - comprehensive Curriculum Vitae
    - practical examination
    - demonstration
    - oral interview by a panel
    - written examination/challenge examination

The decision on which assessment method is used is made by the subject-matter specialist or assessor and depends largely on the nature of the unit of learning to be assessed. For example: the resuscitation a patient in an Emergency Rescue module may call for a practical demonstration of competence, while competence in research may call for prior research undertaken, and competence against a module in philosophy may call for a written assessment.

Assessment methods are chosen based on a consideration of what will constitute sufficient evidence for a professional judgement to be made. Here the explicitness of outcomes-based criteria has to be combined with the (often tacit) knowledge of the professionals involved in making the assessment.

In addition:

- Applicants conduct a self-assessment where they decide whether they will be able to provide sufficient, valid and authentic evidence to succeed. The regional office supports the applicants in gathering, organising and presenting the evidence for assessment.
- The subject-matter specialist/assessor makes the judgement of the evidence. This ensures that the partner institution is satisfied with the quality of the evidence. The regional office acts as moderator in terms of procedural fairness and appeals if required.
- The final recommendation regarding the results of the assessment lies with the partner institution through the normal faculty committee or the university management decision-making processes.

Key characteristics

In order to ensure the highest amount of collaboration between the partner institutions, participation in the regional initiative is entirely voluntary. In addition, RPL in the region is multi-institutional and serves a number of functions. The FSHEC receives no funding from the state and is managed by a small professional team in the regional office. The project is funded by donor-funding and seed money contributed by the partner institutions. A small administrative fee is (where possible) charged to applicants to cover some of the operational cost. The regional office ensures that the project remains within the framework of the national RPL policy (see the 'Quality criteria').

The office is currently still operational as a project. The project was planned for three years and is currently in the third year of operation. The project partners will decide towards the end of this year to either integrate the project's work into their own systems and institutions or to give permanence to the project by transforming it into a formal regional RPL centre.

The South African Insurance Sector

Background to the project

This initiative was developed out of the need to comply with new legislation in relation to the financial and insurance industry in South Africa. In terms of the Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services Act (Act 37 of 2002), all financial advisors and intermediaries are required to register with the Financial Services Board if they wish to continue marketing financial services to the public. For such professional registration, a minimum academic level is required. The purpose of the Act is to professionalise the industry and to protect the consumer. This is a large industry and according to the INSETA, the Act is estimated to affect 75 000 individuals, of whom approximately 20 000 do not meet the minimum requirement stated in the Act. A first round of RPL, conducted by a public higher education institution, took place in 2004 and 80% of 11 000 financial advisors achieved the credits. However, at least 10 000 insurance brokers and advisors still needed to comply. In this particular initiative 2 500 applicants were successful.

Purpose

As noted above, the purpose of this initiative was to upgrade the minimum qualification levels of currently employed financial advisers and insurance brokers in line with the requirements of the Act.

Procedures

The target group of this initiative is a group that is literate and has much work experience that it can bring to bear on the assessment. The support to applicants therefore assumed that less time needed to be spent on the advisory phase.

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Also, because this initiative was undertaken to meet the requirements of the Act, the marketing of RPL took on a different flavour from an initiative where broad, general access and credit were awarded.

The first step involved a nation-wide roadshow to explain the requirements of the Act and to present RPL as a viable solution to comply with the requirements. Step two entailed a self-assessment by the applicants to ascertain whether they felt they had the right depth and level of insurance competence to successfully complete the process.

Once the self-assessment was completed, the applicants were introduced to RPL in a workshop where the assessment principles, the rights of the applicants and the evidence requirements were explained. These workshops were followed up by additional workshops where required, and support was made available telephonically and through e-mail.

A Portfolio of Evidence was submitted. The evidence required in the portfolio was fairly standard, as the institution undertaking the assessment on behalf of INSETA developed a series of assessment tools to facilitate the collection and presentation of evidence. The assessment tools were designed to assess applied competence, i.e. knowledge, ability to perform and ability to reflect and transfer learning to different contexts. The knowledge was assessed by means of written knowledge questionnaires, the ability to perform was assessed through case studies, research projects, reflective essays and comparative exercises.

Communication skills were assessed either face-to-face or by a telephone interview. Applicants submitted evidence using a variety of formats including written evidence, audio and video tape recordings. Also, because the target group was largely homogenous, group assessments were used successfully to assess team-work, oral communication skills, problem solving and cultural sensitivity issues. Internal moderation of 25% of the assessment portfolios was conducted, followed by external moderation by INSETA.

Applicants were given detailed feedback on their results and the assessors made recommendations for an action plan to fill specific gaps emerging from the assessment. On average, the process took eight months per individual to complete. The cost for the RPL process was borne by the employers.

Key characteristics
Because this initiative targeted a particular group with a clearly defined purpose, it was much easier to standardise the assessment. Also, the literacy level of the target group made it possible to make use of more traditional forms of assessment, such as written assignments and knowledge tests. In addition, while the initiative focused on meeting the requirements of the Act, many applicants reported that they had become more confident and skilled in terms of time management, improved organisational abilities, a team approach and research skills. This resulted in improved personal goal-setting, self-management and a sense of pride in their achievement.

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Component 6: Conclusion

6.a) Which national goals, if any, in your country, are 'the recognition of non-formal and informal learning' most closely associated with? Are these goals associated with lifelong learning agenda or something else? If something else, specify.

6.b) What strategies (short-term, mid-term and long-term) are needed to operationalise the 'recognition of all types of learning outcomes – including formal, non-formal and informal learning' in your country? What are the most challenging tasks for policy-makers in the due course?

6.c) Address important policy issues for your counties which have not been addressed in any of the previous Components.

6.d) Please describe how much the 'Lifelong Learning for All' strategies are implemented at post-compulsory education level in your country?

6.e) Please list some 'factors' which you think as unforeseeable and yet necessary conditions to realise the 'Open Learning Society' scenario, which gives value to formal, non-formal and informal learning.

RPL in South Africa is seen to be 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 seemed critical and were carefully constructed. An RPL policy should meet the needs of all the role players, including Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs), providers[16] of education and training, constituents of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and most importantly, the main beneficiaries of the process, the learners.

As the body responsible for the development of the 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;
- 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 within the differing contexts within which recognition of prior learning may take place.

RPL should be an integrated feature of 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 is able to go to scale in meeting the challenges of social,

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[16] 'Providers' refers to all types of institution offering education and training, including formal universities, technikons, colleges, examination and assessment bodies, workplace-based training centres and single-purpose and SME providers.

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economic and human development, while at the same time contributing to the overall quality and integrity of standards and qualifications registered on the NQF.

The key challenge for the implementation of a policy dealing with RPL in South Africa is the sustainability of such a system. It would be shortsighted to suggest that RPL has a redress function only and therefore may have a relatively limited lifespan. As our education and training system matures, RPL will increasingly support the principle of lifelong learning, thereby ensuring that a learning nation is encouraged to continually develop and improve its skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century. As noted in a review of the implementation of the South African NQF, "of all the expectations placed on the NQF, the aspiration for a system of recognition of prior learning (RPL) was perhaps the most significant" (DoE & DoL, 2002:86).

This reflects the high priority accorded throughout the system to the establishment of a credible, sustainable system whereby previously acquired learning can be recognised and credited. However, RPL cannot be seen as the answer to all the questions in the emerging education and training system. In the words of the study team: "On its own, it is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment" (DoE & DoL, 2002), but it is an important strategy to address access to education and training for those previously excluded. As such, RPL is seen as a key developmental strategy – both for the system and for individuals wanting to receive recognition for their learning achieved outside of formal institutions. It is therefore also placed within a framework for the enhancement of lifelong learning. ETQAs and their constituent providers must commit to the principles of access and redress and develop context-specific plans to make this possible.

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Acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
BANKSETA	Banking Sector Education and Training Authority
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CEEQ	Centre for the Evaluation of Foreign Qualifications
CEM	Council of Education Ministers
CETA	Construction Sector Education and Training Authority
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CUP	Committee of University Principals
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
ELSN	Education for Learners with Special Needs
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
EU	European Union
FET	Further Education and Training
FOTIM	Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis
FSHEC	The Free State Higher Education Consortium
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy
GET	General Education and Training
HEDCOM	Heads of Education Committee
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
ILO	International Labour Organisation
JET	Joint Education Trust
JIP	Joint Implementation Plan
JIPSA	Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition
JMB	Joint Matriculation Board
MERSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
NAP	New Academic Policy
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSB	National Standards Body
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCAS	Policy Co-ordination and Advisory Services
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Plan
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAIDE	South African Institute for Distance Education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAFCERT	South African Certification Council
SANQF	South African National Qualifications Framework
SAUVCA	South African University Vice-Chancellors' Association
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
SME	Small and Medium Enterprise
SSP	Sector Skills Plan
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
UNISA	University of South Africa
VET	Vocational Education and Training