



# THE SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

## SAQA BULLETIN

Volume 19 Number 1

March 2020

*Inclusivity*





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**Inclusivity**

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## **SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

POSTNET SUITE 248  
PRIVATE BAG X06  
WATERKLOOF  
0145

FACSIMILE: +27 (0)12 431 5039

WEBSITE: [www.sqa.org.za](http://www.sqa.org.za)

HELPDESK: 086 010 3188

E-MAIL: [sqainfo@sqa.org.za](mailto:sqainfo@sqa.org.za)

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## Foreword

### ***Inclusivity in learning-and-work pathways in South Africa and beyond***

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Lifelong learning is central to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa and the work of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The NQF Act #67 of 2008, NQF policy suite, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, a range of other pieces of legislation with specific foci, and other NQF partners and structures support it. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET's) policies for the coordination and funding of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and articulation, provide further support.

In SAQA Bulletin 2019(1) inclusivity in learning-and-work pathways is understood as referring to enhancing access to and progression in education, training, development and work in the context of the NQF, and to 'getting people into the system' – in South Africa and beyond. Inclusivity in this system is critically important to enable people in our country and beyond to access opportunities that will reduce the triple scourge of unemployment, poverty, and inequality that is with us every day. SAQA called publicly for papers on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) success stories, enhancing access to learning and work, getting people into the system, and lifelong learning opportunities. The result is the 16 strong national and international offerings selected for this publication, each representing extensive research and development. I make four points.

Firstly, while there have been large-scale national and international initiatives to enhance inclusivity, there is still work to do. A decade ago, SAQA sought to identify the barriers to a fully-fledged national RPL system in South Africa. SAQA then sought to address these challenges systematically – through policy refinements, supporting national RPL initiatives, addressing systemic barriers through the Ministerial Task Team for RPL, sharing RPL expertise, and assisting individual RPL processes. This work continues.

Secondly, SAQA recognises professional bodies and registers their professional designations: we are the only country to do so as part of an NQF. Professional bodies are a key link between learning and work; in South Africa, they must support system quality, transparency, professionalisation and inclusivity. Having a qualification does not enable individuals to transition into many professional practices: only professional bodies can award this licence to practice. A key criterion for professional bodies to gain recognition from SAQA is to have RPL policies and to provide RPL routes to their respective professional designations.

Thirdly, SAQA's mandate includes several responsibilities that enhance learning pathways and transparency, including NQF policy suite development, implementation and advocacy. The mandate also includes but is not limited to, SAQA's work on verifying all qualifications and evaluating foreign qualifications; sharing with and learning from international examples; enhancing learning pathways; and research into RPL, articulation, sustainable learning-and-work pathways, and other areas.

Fourth, SAQA works with, supports, and uplifts the range of public and private education and training sectors and institutions that make up the NQF. SAQA acknowledges that much learning is 'below NQF Level 1'.

Underlying all of this work are the foci of quality, transparency, access, redress, progression, and above all, inclusivity. All of the people in our country need to be able to partake in what is on offer.

I believe that the collection of papers in this Bulletin makes a very strong contribution to the discourses around inclusivity in South Africa and beyond, and its practical implementation, in the interests of strengthening access to and progression in, learning-and-work pathways for all. The papers span inclusivity in the important sectors of: (1) Higher Education; (2) learning-work-and-professionalisation; and (3) Adult Learning and Worker Education. Section (4) comprises papers by international authors on inclusivity in the European Union context, where there is an expressed need to increase access and much has been achieved in this respect. The Bulletin concludes with reflections on learning from within and across the papers.

I would like to extend a special thank you to all contributing authors for their willingness to share their thinking, practices and experiences of inclusivity. I also want to extend special thanks to SAQA's Research Directorate and in particular to SAQA's Research Director, Dr Heidi Bolton, for her sterling efforts in framing the Bulletin and providing strong conceptual leadership to ensure its development, coordination and production.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reddy". The letter "R" is large and stylized, with a circular loop at the top. The rest of the name "Reddy" is written in a cursive, flowing script.

**Dr Julie Reddy**  
**Acting Chief Executive Officer**  
**South African Qualifications Authority**

## Introduction

### *Why inclusivity, and why this sequence of papers?*

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This introductory note sketches the context for the papers in this Bulletin. It reminds readers of the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) policy basket – in all of which inclusivity is central. It provides a glimpse into the ‘story of Recognition of Prior learning (RPL)’ in South Africa. It closes by explaining why the theme of inclusivity was selected, and the sequencing of the papers.

### **SAQA, THE NQF, AND INCLUSIVITY**

The NQF was the mechanism chosen to integrate the system for education, training, development and work in democratic South Africa. It is one of the tools intended to address the extreme poverty, inequality, and unemployment in the country. From the start it aimed to enhance access, redress, progression, quality and transparency. The principles underlying all of these goals are lifelong learning and inclusivity.

#### ***Framework for inclusivity***

The first developments in the new system and under the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995) included *structural* integration within and across the sectors. Under the NQF Act (RSA, 2008) which replaced the SAQA Act, the education and training responsibilities of the Departments of Labour (DoL) and Education (DoE) were integrated into the Departments of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and Basic Education (DBE). Three Quality Councils, for General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education, and Occupational Qualifications

respectively, oversee three coordinated NQF Sub-Frameworks<sup>1</sup>. The NQF Amendment Act (RSA, 2019) which amongst others provides for misrepresentation that might occur in the system strengthens SAQA's hand in advancing the objectives of the NQF.

Key 'moments' illustrate further progress in system integration and learner access, redress, and progression in this system.

### **NQF policy suite**

The development of the NQF policy suite between 2012 and 2014 provides guidance for qualifications, professional development, RPL, Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), and assessment. The Quality Councils have developed and implemented related policies. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (DHET, 2013) and its implementation plan (DHET, 2019); and the DHET policies for articulation, and the funding and coordination of RPL, provide further support for the education and training sectors and learner access, and progression.

SAQA's verification and foreign qualification evaluation and advisory work aid learner and worker movements within and beyond the country. The related networks include the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Qualifications Verification network (AQVN), and the Gronginen Declaration work for wider international movement. SAQA's recent international work includes participation in the United Nations Education and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO's) seven-country study of Flexible Learning Pathways (FLP).

### **Learning pathways and articulation**

Within the country, SAQA has developed clearer understandings of 'learning

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<sup>1</sup> These comprise the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) overseen by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi.

pathways' and 'articulation'<sup>2</sup>. Articulation is understood in at least three ways. Learning pathways can comprise formally linked qualifications and/or work experience. These 'systemic' pathways can be supported by 'specific' articulation in the form of RPL, CAT, and other inter-institutional arrangements. Articulation is also enabled when learners are supported as they encounter and overcome barriers in their individual learning pathways. SAQA's recent National Articulation Baseline Study showed how these different types of articulation are being implemented in public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and Colleges across the country. Recent SAQA-UWC (SAQA, 2015a; 2015b) research showed the importance of Flexible Teaching and Learning Provision (FLTP), where flexibility in admission criteria, curriculum, administration systems, learner-support systems, and teaching-and-learning systems, are key. SAQA is currently engaged in an initiative to strengthen learning pathways in the Community Development, Early Childhood Development (ECD), and Engineering sectors, as considerable articulation work had already commenced in these sectors. Initiatives in further sectors will follow.

## **The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

RPL is a key mechanism for enhancing access and redress in South Africa, and the world. The 'story' of RPL in South Africa is summarised in the following section.

## **WHAT IS RPL IN SOUTH AFRICA?**

RPL is defined in South African national policy as "the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development" (SAQA, 2019: Definitions). While assessment is an integral feature of all RPL in the country, it is not treated in isolation from these other steps in the RPL processes: it takes place

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<sup>2</sup> These ideas were first articulated in SAQA-Rhodes research that focused on learning pathways (Lotz-Sisitka, 2015).

in combination with a range of other strategies that allow for different sources of knowledge and forms of learning to be compared and judged. RPL includes diagnostic, formative or summative assessments, to create opportunities for, or towards access and/or credit (*Ibid.*: Clause 15[c]). Ideally, post-RPL top-up (gap-fill) training should be available after RPL processes. In some implementation contexts, gap-fill training is part of RPL processes.

Qualifications, part-qualifications and professional designations registered on the NQF may be awarded in whole or in part through RPL. The processes followed must be credible, quality-assured and consistent with the accepted and approved principles and criteria of SAQA and the relevant Quality Council/ professional body/ institution concerned (*Op.Cit.*: Clause 15[b]).

In South Africa RPL is multi-dimensional – it is a process through which non-formal, informal and formal learning can be measured and mediated against learning outcomes for recognition across different contexts (*Op.Cit.*: Clause 15[a]). It is also multi-contextual: it differs across contexts. It may be developed and implemented differently for the purposes of recognition in the context of the three NQF Sub-Frameworks, professional designations, and recognition in workplaces. It is conducted using a variety of specialised learning interventions and/or assessment approaches through which the knowledge, skills and values of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed. The purposes and contexts of RPL determine the practices and outcomes of the RPL process in each case (*Op.Cit.*: Clause 15[d]).

## **Forms of RPL**

In SAQA's RPL policy, while there are essentially two forms of RPL – RPL for access to learning, and RPL for credits (SAQA, 2019: Clause 7[a,b]) – RPL has also been used for recognition in workplaces, and towards the granting of whole qualifications<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Although this has been designed to enable the awarding of full qualifications via RPL, this is not always being implemented by institutions, who often draw on the '50% Rule' to justify their requirements that learners obtain at least 50% of the qualification concerned, at the certifying institution.

SAQA policy for recognising professional bodies and registering their professional designations in the context of the NQF (SAQA, 2012) requires that the entities provide RPL routes to their professional designations. These designations are traditionally awarded on the basis of qualifications plus the required workplace experience. SAQA's policy requires that for the recognition of professional body alignment with the National Constitution (RSA, 1994) and the NQF, they need to include an RPL route to their professional designations. SAQA has hosted workshops to provide guidance for the professional bodies recognised thus far. Several of these bodies have commenced their RPL work.

### ***Ministerial, SAQA, Quality Council, and entity RPL policies***

#### **Ministerial RPL policy**

There is a 'funnel' of RPL policies at differing levels in South Africa that are aligned or are in the process of being aligned. The DHET has developed and oversees the implementation of, national policy for the coordination and funding of RPL (DHET, 2016), and collaborate with SAQA and the Quality Councils for its implementation.

#### **SAQA's RPL policy**

SAQA in line with its mandate and the DHET's RPL policy develops and oversees the implementation of national RPL policy. SAQA first developed RPL policy in 2002; this policy was revised on the basis of experience gained and research done in 2014, and again in 2019 for alignment to DHET policy. SAQA's role is to support the national RPL Coordinating Mechanism, conduct sector-wide and across-sector RPL research, and ensure both the uploading of RPL data in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), and Quality Council certification of learning achievements in a way that does not discriminate against learners who follow RPL routes. SAQA has uploaded a considerable amount of RPL data to the NLRD; further work is underway to enhance the submission and capturing of such data.

## **Quality Council and Professional Body RPL policies and practices**

In line with the DHET's (2016) and SAQA's (2014; 2016; 2019) RPL policies, the Quality Councils need to develop and oversee the implementation of, RPL policies in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts. There are clear principles, criteria, and responsibilities for the Quality Councils, providers, professional bodies, employers, RPL practitioners, and RPL candidates (SAQA, 2019: Clauses 19-23).

## **THE EMERGENCE OF AN RPL SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### ***RPL in South Africa 1995-2008***

The Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2009) study of RPL across 18 countries positioned South Africa in a cluster of five countries at 'Stage 5 of 7' in terms of setting up a national RPL system - a stage which comprised 'islands of good RPL practices'. The study found four countries at 'Stage 6 of 7' or 'in the process of setting up national RPL systems', and no countries with 'Stage 7' fully-fledged national RPL systems (*Ibid.*). South Africa was described in the study as having a vision for RPL, many practices, access for people from different backgrounds, and sporadic funding. The research report also commented that 'not all levels or sectors were open' to RPL (OECD, 2009; OECD-SAQA, 2009:23).

### ***RPL in the years 2010-2011***

At the SAQA-hosted *National RPL Workshop* in 2010, blockages and needs stemming from the first years of RPL implementation in the country were identified in relation to four key areas, namely:

- (a) sharing effective delivery models for RPL;
- (b) enhancing the quality of RPL;
- (c) developing workable funding models for RPL; and
- (d) addressing legislative and other barriers to the expansion of RPL nationally.

These needs were addressed at SAQA's 2011 *National RPL Conference: Building and expanding existing islands of excellent practice*, where there was a stream dedicated to addressing each of the categories of barriers identified (SAQA, 2011a). One of the outputs of the conference was the *Resolution and Working Document on RPL* (SAQA, 2011b), which was endorsed by the 350 participating delegates. SAQA addressed some of the items in it, in its RPL policy revision process; the Ministerial Task Team for RPL addressed others.

### ***RPL in South Africa Since 2011***

Following the *National RPL Conference* of 2011, dissemination of the *Working Document on RPL*, and SAQA's recommendation, a Ministerial Task Team on RPL was appointed. This Task Team conducted research into RPL legislation and policy, the status of RPL in the sub-sectors making up the NQF, funding models, and a comparison of different international RPL coordinating mechanisms (Minister of Higher Education and Training [MHET], 2013; SAQA, 2012). SAQA played a leading role in this work. The Task Team recommended the development of a National RPL Institute, which led to the DHET policy for the coordination and funding of RPL (MHET, 2016).

Following the 2011 RPL conference, SAQA appointed a representative RPL Reference Group through a democratic process, and revised its RPL policy<sup>4</sup>. SAQA work-shopped its revised RPL policy extensively early in 2014, as part of its *National RPL Conference 2014: Tried and Tested, Tools, Templates* as part of its work to drive RPL implementation.

Between mid-2010 and mid-2015, prior to the DHET policy for the coordination of RPL, SAQA undertook strategic national RPL initiatives for individuals and organisations that approached it for assistance; the DHET continues to assist individuals. SAQA assisted over 400 individuals and 20 organisations in this

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<sup>4</sup> As noted, this policy was revised again after the publication of the DHET's RPL coordination policy.

period, including the:

- Agricultural sector;
- Correctional Services;
- Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa (DENOSA);
- Department of Defence (DoD);
- Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA);
- Department of Social Development (DSD);
- Department of Transport (DoT);
- Education and Labour Relations Council (ELRC);
- Marine Industry Association of Southern Africa (MIASA);
- National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB);
- Rand Water;
- Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC);
- State Information Technology Agency (SITA);
- South African Police Services (SAPS) and others.

### ***SAQA-UWC-HSRC peer-reviewed RPL book***

SAQA established a five-year partnership with the University of the Western Cape (UWC) for research towards an inclusive RPL model. This work included conducting and documenting action research into four existing successful RPL initiatives. The findings were used to develop an inclusive RPL model which was theorised at a level of generality that enabled its application across the four diverse contexts.

As well as informing SAQA's RPL policy revision, and being written up in various other forms, the findings of the research were compiled into the first peer-reviewed book on RPL, *Crossing the lines: RPL as specialised pedagogy* (Cooper *et al* 2016).

## RPL DATA

Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL, but while the submission of RPL data is mandatory, only some entities submit these data. SAQA is aware that many other entities are conducting considerable RPL, and is in the process of addressing the submission of the related data. The RPL records in the NLRD are analysed below: the analysis focuses on the achievement of qualifications through RPL; the achievements of unit standards not yet leading to a completed qualification, are excluded.

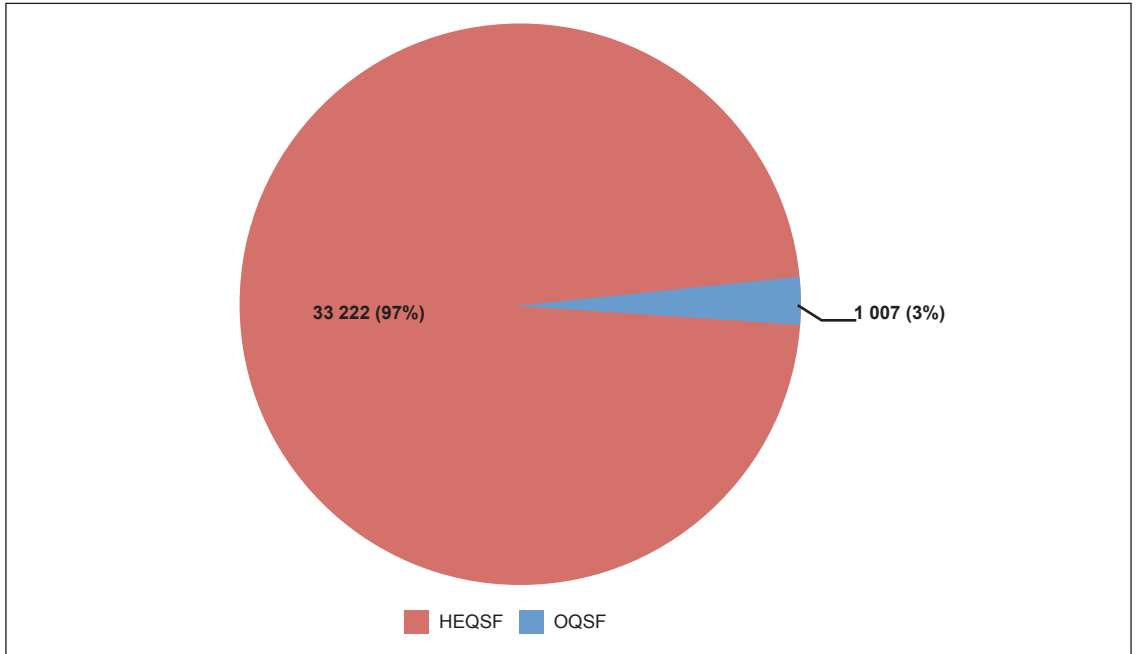
In all, of 30 730 people on the NLRD have achieved qualifications through RPL. The total number of records of the achievement of qualifications through RPL is 34 229 (i.e. some learners have more than one achievement via RPL). A total of 224 qualifications have been achieved through RPL, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Achievements through RPL in the National Learners' Records Database (Source: NLRD, 1998-2017)**

Summary RPL data		Total
Learners	Number of <b>learners</b> who achieved one or more <b>qualifications</b> via RPL	30 730
	Number of <b>learners</b> who achieved one or more <b>unit standards</b> via RPL	78 714
Records of achievement	Total <b>qualification achievements</b> through RPL	34 229
	Total <b>part-qualification achievements</b> through RPL	2 348
Qualifications	Number of different <b>qualifications</b> achieved through RPL	224

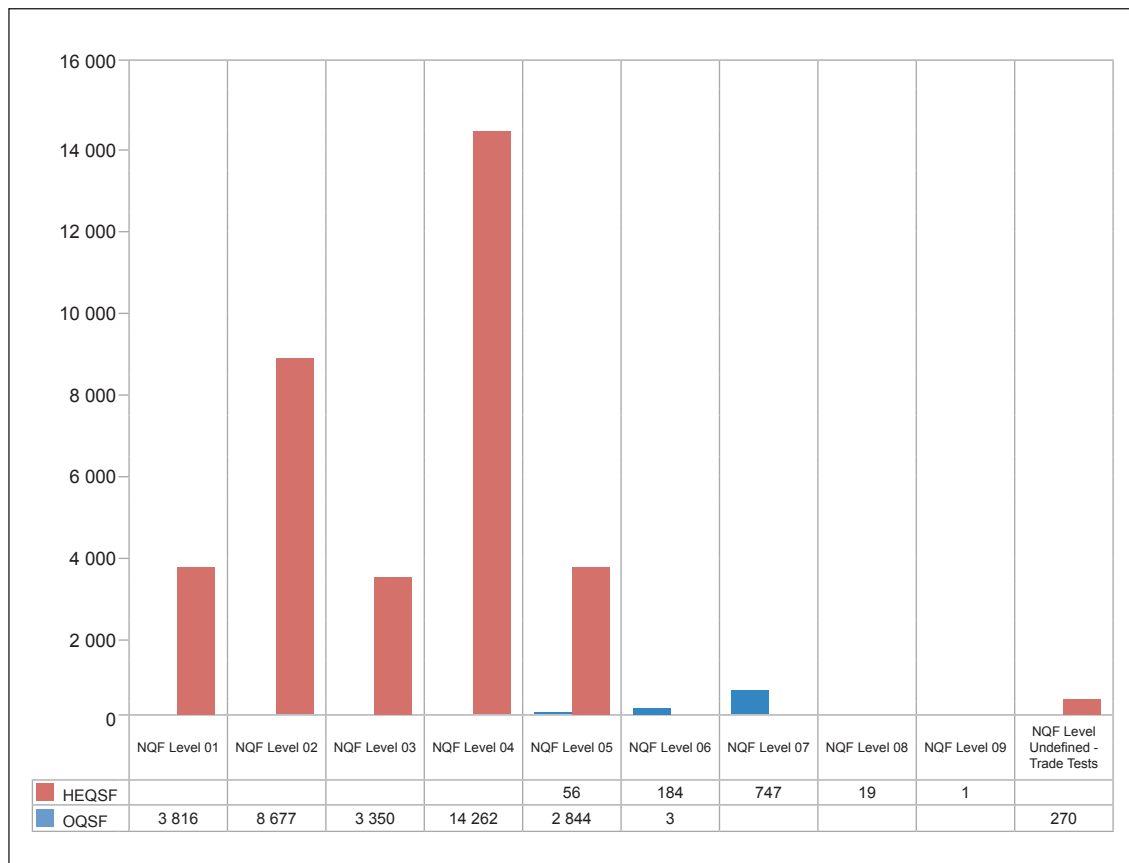
Overall, 97% of the learning achievements via RPL recorded in the NLRD, are in the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) context; only 3% are in the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) context although SAQA is aware that far more Higher Education RPL records exist than have been submitted to the NLRD. There are no learning achievements through RPL

recorded in the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) context.



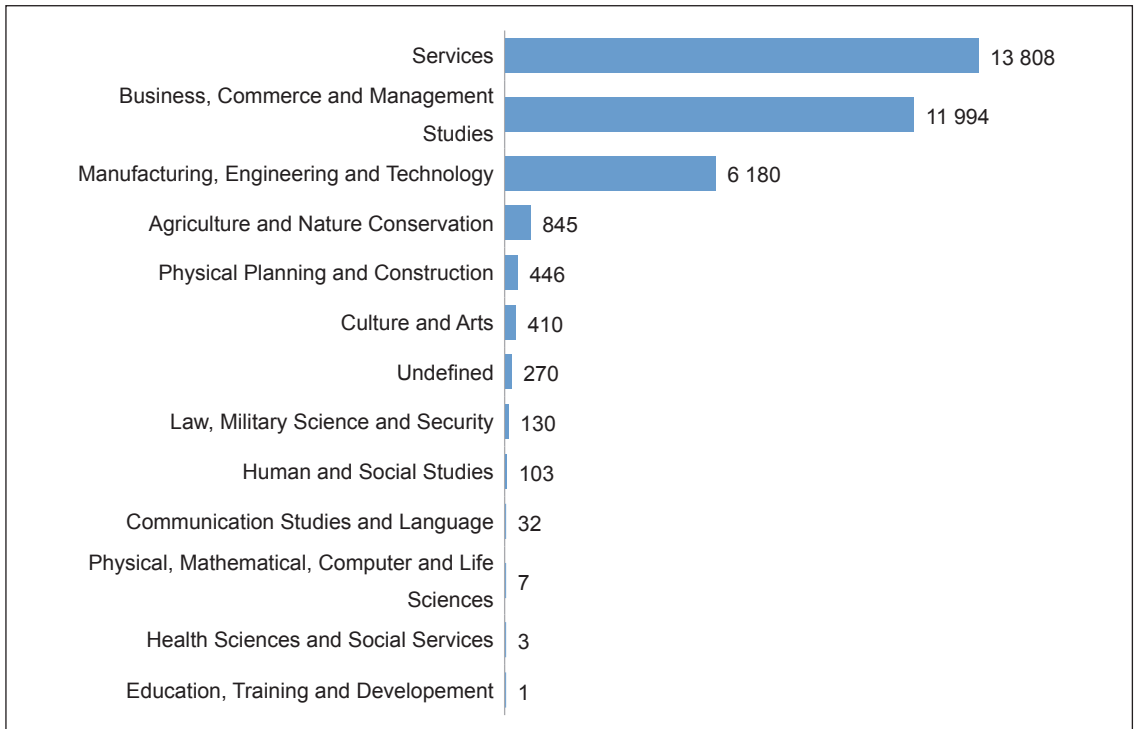
**Figure 1: Achievements via RPL by Sub-Framework, 1998-2017 (Source: NLRD)**

About 42% of the recorded learning achievements via RPL were achieved at NQF Level 4, followed by achievements at NQF Level 2 (25%) and NQF Level 1 (11%). Figure 2 below shows that all the RPL achievements at NQF Levels 7, 8 and 9 were in the HEQSF context.



**Figure 2: Achievements via RPL by NQF Level and Sub-Framework, 1998-2017 (Source: NLRD)**

The majority (40%) of the 34 229 recorded achievements via RPL were in the NQF field of Services, followed by those in the fields of Business, Commerce and Management Studies (35%), and Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology (18%), as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Achievements via RPL by NQF Field, 1998-2017 (Source: NLRD)**

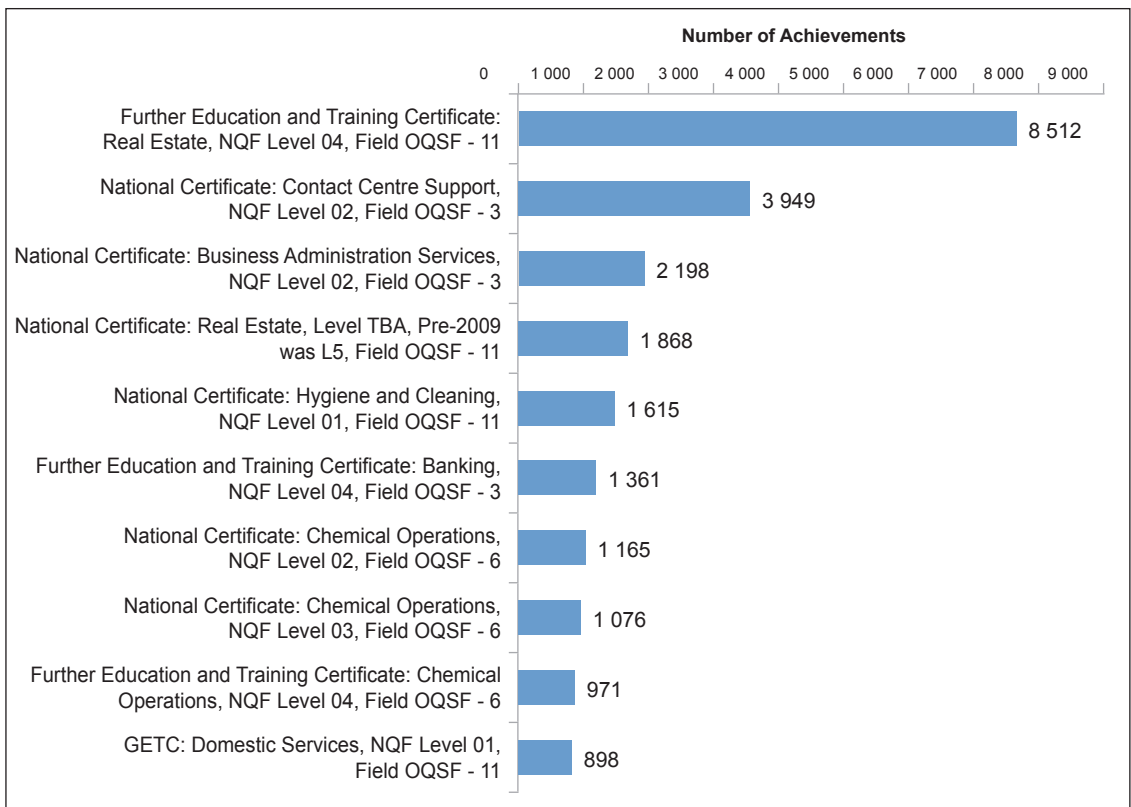
The qualification with the highest number of RPL achievements was the Further Education and Training Certificate: Real Estate, at NQF Level 4, with over 8 000 people. Figure 4 shows the top ten qualifications with RPL achievements against them.

## REFLECTING ON THE RPL DEVELOPMENTS AND DATA

There were isolated instances of RPL in South Africa before the onset of democracy but it has been legislated since 1995. SAQA oversaw the development of the first RPL policy, criteria, and guidelines published in 2002 and 2004 respectively, and encouraged its implementation – to the extent that the OECD found ‘good RPL practices’ in pockets across the country in 2009.

SAQA’s strong focus on consolidating the national RPL system from 2010 – in seeking to ascertain and address the barriers to a fully-fledged system, revising its policy, recommending and supporting the Ministerial RPL Task Team, and

leading large national RPL initiatives – led to the DHET policy for coordinating and funding RPL. It also supported the beginnings of an RPL Coordinating Mechanism, the development and publication of the Quality Council policies for RPL in their NQF Sub-Framework contexts, and the mandatory submission of RPL data for uploading into the NLRD.



**Figure 4: Qualifications, with the highest numbers of RPL achievements, 1998-2017 (Source: NLRD)**

While these developments are significant, more work remains to be done. SAQA has aligned its policy for implementing RPL, to the DHET's policy for coordinating and funding RPL. There are aspects in the Quality Councils' RPL policies, that still need to be aligned to those of SAQA and the DHET.

While some entities submit RPL data for uploading into the NLRD, not all entities are providing these data. About half of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) are providing data, as are about 10% of the private HEIs.

SAQA has no RPL data from public HEIs although there are RPL practices in these institutions. In some of these HEIs, the application for admission is via 'traditional' or 'RPL' routes, showing the embedding of RPL in their systems. SAQA is in the process of addressing these issues.

## **WHY INCLUSIVITY, AND WHY THE SEQUENCE OF PAPERS?**

The brief history of RPL presented points to the need to continue and extend the initiatives described. The intention is that this Bulletin will show some RPL initiatives from which others could learn, and develop further. There is a desire also, to show other initiatives that enhance inclusivity, for the same reasons. There is potential to apply the initiatives described in the papers, in other sectors and across countries.

The call for papers for SAQA Bulletin 2019(1), which was sent to all NQF stakeholders and SAQA's international Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) contacts, asked the potential writers to focus on:

- RPL 'success cases';
- initiatives that 'get people into the system' of education, training, development and work; and
- 'lifelong learning opportunities'.

The 14 papers in this volume were grouped easily according to their foci on (1) RPL in Higher Education; (2) inclusivity in learning, work, and professional development; (3) Adult Learning, Worker Education, and learning outside the NQF that is linked to a progression pathway, and (4) international perspectives.

Each of the papers makes a valuable contribution to inclusivity, and the discourses around inclusivity. It is hoped that readers of this Bulletin will be inspired and encouraged to engage with this agenda for the benefit of lifelong learners everywhere.

**Dr Heidi Bolton**  
**Research Director**  
**South African Qualifications Authority**

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# **INCLUSIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA**



# PAPER 1



# The History, Artistry and Challenges of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Access to Undergraduate Study at a South African University

*Mr Alan Ralphs, Mr Nigel Prinsloo, and Ms Rethabile Mcube*

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## ABSTRACT

How do we characterise *successful* Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) practices within the Higher Education sector in South Africa? We could use quantitative data to show the numbers of students admitted to undergraduate or postgraduate-level study, with or without exemption; and we could supplement that data with a number of carefully selected narratives about the history and accomplishments of those who have successfully graduated from these institutions over the last few years. Alternatively, we could be more honest and provide a comprehensive dataset showing the number of RPL applications, admissions and exclusions over successive years, and the subsequent completion rates of admitted students as they made their way through their respective study programmes at the university. But perhaps more importantly for our purposes in this paper, we could focus on the ‘inner workings’ and conceptual logic of RPL as a basis for understanding the complex sociologies and epistemologies of the knowledge recognition, inclusion and exclusion associated with emergent RPL programmes and services in specific institutional settings. Our argument in this paper is that RPL programmes and services have become increasingly specialised and thus require dedicated staff and resources in order to grapple with these challenges and maintain the standards and quality of provision in the face of growing demand across the post-school system in South Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper speaks to the history and growth of an ‘RPL for access’ programme at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) over the last 18 years. The programme began in 2001 with just over 60 participants. By 2018, it had successfully

supported the admission of 850 mature students<sup>5</sup> to undergraduate level study, whilst at the same time growing the RPL advising and information service to well over 1500 members of the public per year. The programme has always had a strong evaluation and research component to its development. In 2009, we joined a four-year-long collaborative study of RPL practices with colleagues at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and two other colleges<sup>6</sup>. This project included the development of a conceptual model with which to understand and explain the design, artistry and challenges of RPL practices as a form of *specialised pedagogy* and in this case, for working with adult students as they navigate the boundaries for access to undergraduate study at university (Cooper and Ralphs, 2016).

We commence the paper with a brief historical overview of the institutional context and RPL programme at UWC, followed by a description of the conceptual model and its implementation through the reflective lenses of three key role players involved in the facilitation, mentoring and assessment aspects of the programme. One of the authors of this paper was a beneficiary of the programme and is now employed in UWC's RPL Office as an RPL Advisor, Mentor and Administrator. We conclude with a brief discussion of the policy and the implementation challenges facing universities and publicly funded Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges and Community Education and Training (CET) Colleges in building, expanding and sustaining RPL programmes and services as part of a more inclusive and effective Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system in South Africa.

### ***Brief historical overview – the institutional context***

As stated above, the RPL project at UWC began in 2001. It was one arm of a multi-pronged strategy to broaden the base of admissions and advance the

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<sup>5</sup> Applicants who are 23 years of age, or older.

<sup>6</sup> UCT is a public university; one college was a private Further Education and Training (FET) college in Gauteng, the other, the Workers' College in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (two provinces in South Africa).

lifelong learning mission of the university. It started at a time when mainstream (full-time) student enrolments were falling, attrition rates were high, and the university was in very serious debt. The university had a long history of part-time study and after-hours provision for working adults<sup>7</sup>. The Senate took a decision in 1988, to establish the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) with a specific mandate to ‘work intimately with faculties’ to assist with the rapid growth in numbers of continuing studies students and to help to shift the programmes in a planned way, towards being ‘responsive, flexible, resource-based approaches’ to teaching and learning.

The start of the RPL programme was thus part of a much larger campaign driven by the DLL to expand the university’s provision of part-time studies and continuing education, and to infuse the discourse of lifelong learning into the policies, systems and curriculum offerings of the university as a whole. To some extent, this campaign was successful, but not on the scale that was expected, and was soon overtaken by the changing government policies<sup>8</sup> and regional demographics that saw the return of young matriculants in large numbers. Whereas 22% of enrolled students were part-time in 2004, by 2010 it was only 10%, leaving faculties little option but to close down most of their after-hours offerings. This was not good for many RPL applicants who, by 2010, were mostly women in their mid-30s and struggling to secure employment and take care of their families.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, the DLL’s mandate to explore “flexible, resource-based approaches to teaching and learning” took on greater significance with Professor Shirley Walters arguing that the hard distinctions between working and non-working students, or between part-time and full-time study, no longer held true. She argued that a comprehensive approach to flexible learning and provision across faculties was now relevant, possible and necessary across

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<sup>7</sup> Most notably in the arts, law, business studies, and adult education.

<sup>8</sup> These included additions to the state subsidy, National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursaries, and a recapitalisation fund to ease university student-debt.

the university<sup>9</sup>. These insights soon became part of the strategic thinking, and the focus of the university as it took on the challenges of the digital age. The discourse of the ‘engaged’ university<sup>10</sup> became prominent in the institutional operational plans. The DLL was dismantled in 2017 following the retirement of Professor Walters, and the turbulence of the Fees Must Fall (FMF) protests<sup>11</sup>. The RPL Unit was thus relocated to the Directorate for Teaching and Learning where it continues to function in a more blended-learning format although on a severely curtailed budget<sup>12</sup>. We return to this issue in our conclusion.

### ***Seventeen years of building RPL policies, systems, programmes and services***

The first few years of building the new RPL programme involved a range of preparatory activities including feasibility studies, fundraising, policy-making, systems and course development. These were followed by a period of marketing, recruitment, implementation, progress evaluations, and then more in-depth research, innovation and change. The initial process of policy formulation and strategic planning led to the decision to provide a choice of two options through which RPL applicants could demonstrate their readiness for university-level study. One option was to show readiness via a set of admissions tests known as the Tests for Access and Placement (TAPs); the other option was a Portfolio Development Course (PDC) and subsequent submission of a Learning Portfolio for assessment by a faculty-based panel of academic staff.

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<sup>9</sup> These arguments found support in a three-year action-research project with staff involved from three faculty-based programmes for working students, the findings of which have been distributed at UWC and nationally through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and related networks in the PSET system.

<sup>10</sup> See UWC’s Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) for the period 2010-2014 for a full elaboration of this notion of the engaged university.

<sup>11</sup> Student protests over the years, most recently surfacing from 2015.

<sup>12</sup> RPL remains a completely unfunded mandate at public universities and colleges despite a rash of new government policies promoting RPL and ‘articulation’ practices, and acknowledging the need for adequate resources to ensure quality, affordability, and the professionalisation of practitioners (DHET, 2013, 2016, 2017; SAQA, 2014, 2016, 2019; CHE, 2016).

The TAPs, which were suggested for applicants who were more recently out of school or college, consisted of a battery of standardised tests<sup>13</sup> and a Reading and Writing Proficiency Test specifically designed for RPL candidates. The PDC, on the other hand, was designed for those who were hoping to take a course of study similar to the field in which they were already working and, therefore, knowledgeable. The original design of the PDC consisted of three workshops conducted over a three-week period inclusive of individualised mentoring sessions. After the workshops, candidates submitted a Learning Portfolio consisting of a Motivation Statement, a Curriculum Vitae (CV), an Auto-biographical Learning History (ALH), an Article Review on a subject similar to their proposed field of study, and documentary evidence of their prior formal and experiential learning – for example, education and training certificates, references, and other relevant artefactual evidence.

The launch of the RPL programme resulted in 113 applicants<sup>14</sup> for the year 2001. Eighty-four (84) of these opted for the PDC and 29 for the TAPs. Of these, 52 (46%) were subsequently successful in meeting the requirements for admission to the university, and 61 (54%) were excluded. The figures in Table 1 below indicate that only 43 of these successful candidates registered to study, which means that nine (17%) others were unable to take up the offer to study for various reasons<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> See Griessel (Ed.) (2006) for a detailed review of the history and development of these tests that emerged as part of the Alternative Admissions Research Project (AARP), and the Tertiary Education Linkages Project (TELP), and which preceded the current National Benchmark Tests (NBTs). All of these were designed as diagnostic and placement tests for matriculants with or without exemption or a Bachelor's admission pass. Together these tests cover academic literacy, quantitative literacy, mathematics and natural science.

<sup>14</sup> 100 (89%) were over the age of 30, and 71 (63%) were male participants. Less than 15% of these applicants had a matriculation certificate of any kind although some had completed some kind of post-school certificate or diploma courses relevant to their desired field of undergraduate study (Thaver, Naidoo and Breier, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> This is a pattern that has continued over the years since the programme was launched and whilst the most common reasons would be family, finance and/or work commitments, the university has supported the 'currency' principle which allows successful applicants to reapply in a subsequent year if they are able to do so.

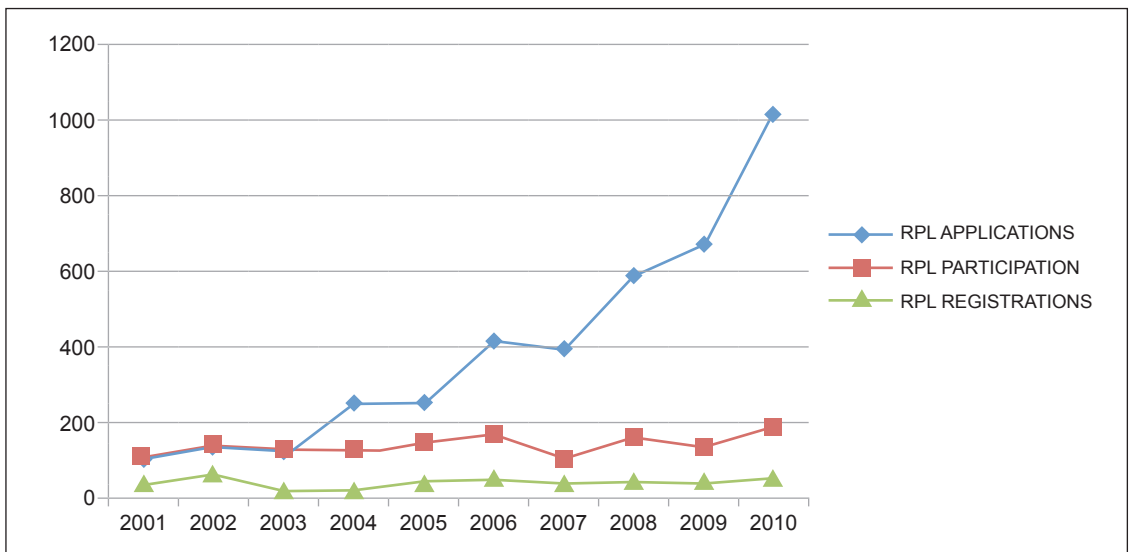
**Table 1: RPL applications, participation (PDC & TAP), and registrations, 2001-2010 (Source: Ralphs, 2012:16)**

Item	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Total
<b>APPLICATIONS</b>	113	144	132	260	266	433	408	607	695	1050	<b>4108</b>
<b>PARTICIPATION</b>	113	144	132	130	150	172	106	160	138	188	<b>1433</b>
<b>REGISTRATION</b>	43	72	25	26	42	58	42	47	48	55	<b>458</b>

Key:

PDC=Portfolio Development Course

TAP=Tests for Access and Placement



**Figure 1: RPL applications, participation and registrations 2001-2010 (Source: Ralphs, 2012:16)**

The period 2001-2004 focused on laying the foundation for the development and growth of the RPL programme, inclusive of one peer-review (Osman and Castle, 2001) and one institutional evaluation (Thaver *et al* 2002), and two postgraduate research theses (Hendriks, 2001; Osman, 2003). The period 2005-2010 focused on expanding the quality and scale of the programme to meet the rapid escalation in public demand and, at the same time, convincing the Senate

about the merits of the programme in terms of the numbers and results of those admitted to undergraduate study.

The figures in Table 1 indicate just how rapidly public interest in the programme grew after the first four years of implementation, with applications soaring to 1050 by 2010 as the awareness about the programme spread most notably through those who had already been accepted. This put a lot more pressure on the RPL Unit to formalise the *advising and information services* and the *selection criteria* for enrolment into the PDC and the TAPs. In practice, it meant that all applicants went through a front-line advisor with the knowledge and skills to handle their RPL enquiries in the three main local languages in the Province, English, *isiXhosa* and *Afrikaans*<sup>16</sup>, following which, they were required to attend an information session with an RPL specialist in groups of 20. These sessions, facilitated as an adult learning conversation, provided applicants with the opportunity to share their unconventional learning journeys and explore the curriculum offerings and requirements for access and success at the university. Thereafter, applicants completed a second application form with more detailed questions concerning their knowledge, skills, motivation, and their understanding of the demands of university-level learning. Box 1 shows the range of RPL programmes and services available.

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<sup>16</sup> There are 11 official languages in South Africa.

### **Box 1: RPL programmes and services at UWC, 2001-2018**

#### **RPL programmes and services**

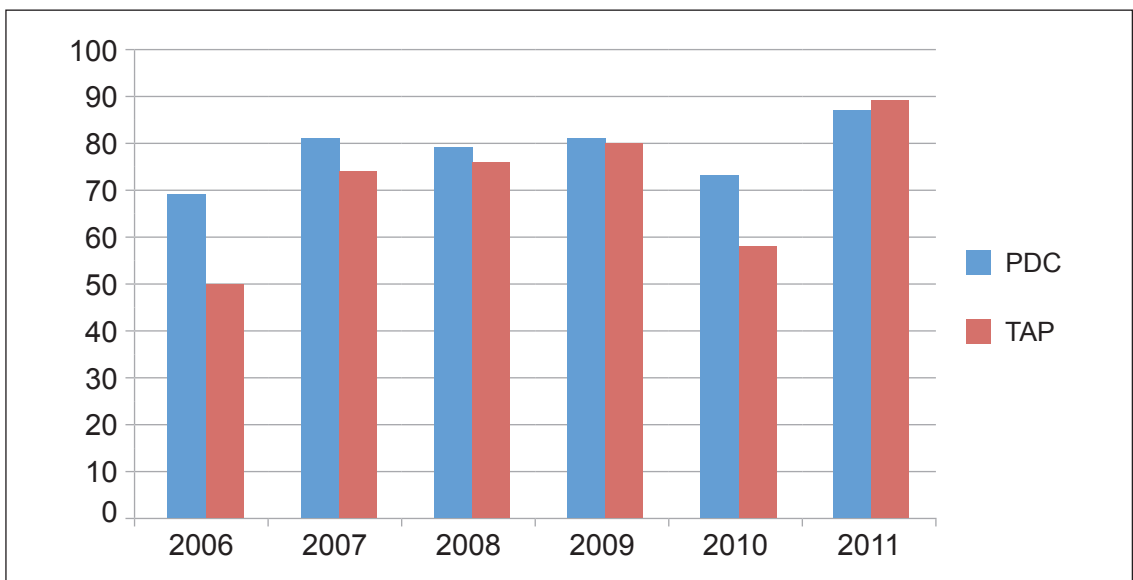
1. Front-line advising in all local languages: opening the learning conversation with interested members of the public.
2. Information sessions: broadening and deepening the learning conversation.
3. Short-listing for pre-selection workshops: letters referring to TVET and other options for those excluded.
4. Pre-selection workshops to engage and test fundamental literacies, and make final selections for the PDC and TAPs.
5. Portfolio Development Course and mentoring (12 weeks).
6. Tests for Access and Placement.
7. Assessment of Learning Portfolios and Test Results and Interviews.
8. Administration and Registration of successful candidates.
9. Post-entry support and monitoring.

Information from the forms and attached certificates (school-leaving and college certificates, and so forth) was used to choose (select and exclude) candidates for a *pre-selection workshop* linked to their preference for the PDC and the TAPs. There were two pre-selection workshops of three hours each, with content and pedagogical activities geared to different forms of academic discourse such as critical thinking, reading and writing for the PDC, and more formal written literacies and numeracies for the TAP-focused workshop. Each workshop included a written 'test', the results of which formed the basis to decide who was selected for the PDC and/or the TAPs. Further discussion follows below.

A discussion of the changes that were made to different aspects of the programme<sup>17</sup> during this period 2005-2010, most notably to the PDC, is provided

<sup>17</sup> These included a new team of three staff members (senior academic, professional administrator, front-line advisor), changes to the content and pedagogy of the PDC, modifications to the official undergraduate application forms, the recruitment and training of contract mentors, and seminars for academic staff sitting on RPL assessment panels.

below and documented in a detailed Case Study research report completed in 2012 (Ralphs, 2012), but three sets of data from that research project stand out for comment at this point. The first is visible in both Table 1 and Figure 1 above, which indicate a growing gap between the rapidly escalating numbers of applications, and those actually admitted after completing the PDC or TAPs; and in Figure 2 below, the first semester modular pass rates of the PDC and TAPs candidates over the period from 2006 to 2011. The latter is a significant first benchmark of the successful admission of *RPL*<sup>18</sup> students, as these exams are taken by all students, regardless of how they qualified for admission.



Item	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
PDC	69	81	79	81	73	87
TAP	50	74	76	80	58	89

**Figure 2: PDC and TAP – percentages of first semester modular pass rates**  
(Source: Ralphs and Associates, 2012:45)

In Table 2 below, the data speak to another important milestone for benchmarking the success rates of RPL for access to undergraduate study in South

<sup>18</sup> The *RPL* prefix is used here purely as a reference for analytical purposes – and not as an acceptable label for students admitted via RPL rules and procedures.

Africa. Table 2 shows the completion of a full set of (120) first-year credits as required by the Matriculation Board<sup>19</sup> to grant full exemption status to these students. This milestone was achieved by an average of 63% of students in our cohort study<sup>20</sup>.

**Table 2: Reaching the 120-credit-mark per cohort and route of entry (Source: Ralphs and Associates, 2012)**

No. of students per cohort	Route of entry (n=)	No. of students obtaining 120 credits	%	Student % per cohort, with 120 credits by December 2009
<b>2006</b> <b>63 Students</b> <sup>21</sup>	PDC (58)	39	67,2	68,3%
	TAP (2)	2	100,0	
<b>2007</b> <b>56 Students</b> <sup>22</sup>	PDC (40)	25	62,5	62%
	TAP (10)	6	60,0	
<b>2008</b> <b>40 Students</b> <sup>23</sup>	PDC (28)	20	71,4	59,5%
	TAP (9)	2	22,2	

Key

1. Three portfolio students were admitted as occasional students: the value=n is adjusted accordingly
2. Five PDC students and one TAP student were admitted as occasional students
3. Three PDC students were admitted as occasional students

Returning to the patterns in Table 1 and the accompanying Figure 1, the figures indicate that despite the escalating pool of applicants, the proportion qualifying for participation in the PDC and TAPs over the same period (and subsequently) hardly changed. Furthermore, the numbers actually registering to study after

<sup>19</sup> Currently operating under the jurisdiction of Universities South Africa (USAf) pending regulations to bring it under the authority of Umalusi, Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.

<sup>20</sup> We looked at the results of three cohorts of students admitted via RPL in 2006 (68.3%), 2007 (62.0%), and 2008 (59.5%) (Ralphs and Associates, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Three portfolio students were admitted as occasional students so 'n' for the purpose of this exercise is adjusted accordingly.

<sup>22</sup> Five PDC students and one TAP student were admitted as occasional students.

<sup>23</sup> Three portfolio students were admitted as occasional students.

completing the PDC or the TAPs assessments, showed almost no increase at all. To put it bluntly, by 2010, we had reached a point where almost seven times in the number of applicants were excluded compared to 2004. This presented a formidable conundrum for, although the applications pool was increasing exponentially, we were unable to increase the number of admissions proportionately. It was this contradiction, along with the low completion/ success rates<sup>24</sup> of those who did participate in the PDC or TAPs, that drove us to frame the question for our research project which commenced in 2010: 'What needs to change for RPL to become a more optimally inclusive and effective practice in Higher Education?'

## RPL AS SPECIALISED PEDAGOGY

The search for a theoretical framework for grappling with the kinds of tensions and contradictions mentioned above has been part and parcel of the growth of the programme at UWC from its inception in 2001. At that time, the challenge articulated by Professor Wally Morrow (2009) was to infuse the political discourse about widening participation in Higher Education with the principle of 'epistemological access'. By this he meant that *opening access* to college or university-level study for the 'underprepared' students would be futile without an equal investment in the scaffolding and academic support students needed to help them to succeed.

Morrow's (2009) challenge provoked an interesting debate amongst RPL scholars at UWC, not least of all around the findings of the first evaluation report of the pilot programme (Thaver *et al* 2002). These findings suggested that the success of the first cohort of candidates in 2001, most of whom did not have matric, was best explained with reference to the knowledge and skills acquired in various formal and non-formal training courses taken after leaving school. This line of argument was countered by the course facilitator (Hendriks, 2001), who argued that the experiential knowledge and skills acquired informally were

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<sup>24</sup> Only 458 (32%) of students actually registered after qualifying to participate in the PDC or TAPs.

equally valid, if not a better basis, for the successful admission of mature students. In her thesis, which included a case study of the RPL programme at UWC, Osman (2003) suggested that the debate should not be polarised between academic and experiential forms of knowledge and learning, but rather understood as a paradox<sup>25</sup>:

The two can and should complement each other. RPL is not about denying academic forms of knowing, rather, it's about exploring ways in which experiential learning can also be part of the *repertoire* of students learning within the university (*Ibid.*:159).

So, staying with this paradox, and inspired by a growing body of scholarly work on different models and approaches to RPL and RPL Portfolio Development in South Africa and internationally (Harris, 2000; Osman, 2003; Breier, 2003; Michelson and Mandell *et al* 2004; Andersson and Harris [Eds.], 2006; Cooper, 2006), we proceeded for the next five years (2005-2010) by trial and error to make changes to the design and implementation of different aspects of the programme, most notably to the Portfolio Development Course. The aim was to offer participants more than just a 'how-to' guide for producing a Learning Portfolio to prescribed standards. Rather, the aim was to create an interactive, dialogical space (Rule, 2006) within which participants could engage with the essential logic and principles embedded in the design of different sections of the Learning Portfolio, such as the concepts associated with experiential learning<sup>26</sup>, critical thinking, and the text-based literacies<sup>27</sup> associated with learning in academic contexts.

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<sup>25</sup> "They seem to be struggling with the knowledge paradox – if they [the university staff] value experiential knowledge only, they marginalise students in a university environment where academic knowledge is powerful. If on the other hand they render experiential knowledge invisible, then they are contributing to the dominance of academic knowledge in the academy" (Osman, 2003:159).

<sup>26</sup> Kolb's (1984) model of Experiential Learning and related Learning Styles Inventory; Marton and Säljö (1976) Surface and Deep level Learning; Illeris's (2002) Three Dimensions of Learning; Bruner's (1986) Narrative Learning Theory; Mezirow's (1990) concepts of Reflective Practitioner and Transformative Learning, as well as Formative and Summative Assessment Principles, *etc.*

<sup>27</sup> Slonimsky and Shalem (2006), Lillis (2003), Boughey (2002).

**Table 3: UWC's Portfolio Development Course – content and concepts**

Learning Portfolio – content and outcomes	Concept development – selection and sequencing
1. Motivation statement (writing a motivation statement)	1. Adult education and experiential learning theory
2. Skills profile and Curriculum Vitae (developing own skills profile and curriculum vitae)	2. Situated learning theory and the sociology of knowledge
3. Autobiographical learning history (developing own learning history)	3. Narrative learning theory
4. Article and book review (doing reviews)	4. Academic literacy and text-based Practices
5. Special project report (compiling a report)	5. Academic literacy: critical thinking and literature search
6. Supporting evidence (gathering supporting evidence)	6. Assessment principles and procedures

These concepts all had a bearing on different aspects of the Learning Portfolio as indicated in Table 3 above. The concepts were introduced pedagogically in the contact sessions in the form of a variety of deductive and inductive learning activities such as journal writing, worksheets, assignments, formative feedback, group discussion, lectures, role-plays, debates, *etcetera*. These changes had the effect of extending the content, sequence and pacing of the course<sup>28</sup> to five workshops over five weeks plus another four weeks for the completion of the Learning Portfolio with individualised mentoring support. We hoped that with more dialogue and scaffolding, the completion and admission rates of participants on the course would improve. However, this was not the case as the percentage of successful completions fell from 44% in 2006, to 36% in 2010 (see Figure 1). The contradiction was growing, and we needed to know, 'why?'

<sup>28</sup> At this stage, we were offering two PDCs a year with a maximum enrolment of 65 candidates per course.

In 2009, we began the new research project in partnership with the Research Directorate at SAQA and colleagues from UCT, the Worker's College and one private FET College (see also Footnote 6 above). The timing of the project was significant given the changes made to South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) architecture by the NQF Act of 2008, and the perceptions in some government circles<sup>29</sup> that the implementation of RPL policies and practices as part of an NQF-led reform strategy had been a big disappointment. Our argument in the project proposal was that "whereas the policy discourse espoused the inclusive nature and merits of RPL as an assessment-led practice, much of the work is in fact pedagogical in nature, although the affordances and constraints of these practices remained largely invisible and under-theorised" (Cooper and Ralphs, 2016:10).

Four lines of enquiry, as follows, were agreed for the exploration and comparison of the case studies which made up a large part of this research, given the wide diversity of the RPL practices across the four sites investigated.

**Knowledge:** What knowledge is valued or excluded in RPL practice, and how does it shape the nature of the practice? How strong are the boundaries between academic and experiential learning and how are they maintained or challenged in and through the practice?

**Pedagogy:** How does the pedagogy (methods, instruments, rules, languages, procedures) mediate adult learner participation or exclusion across the continuum of formal and informal learning?

**Institutional conditions:** In what ways do institutional cultures, policies, rules, fees and other aspects impact on the inclusive or exclusive nature of the RPL practice?

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<sup>29</sup> Task Team Report on the implementation of the NQF (DoE-DoL, 2002).

**Learner agency:** With what capacities and limitations do learners negotiate the opportunities and barriers of RPL in the national learning system, and the RPL process?

The first phase of the research was all about the case studies, using quantitative and qualitative methods to form a comparative picture of the different practices at the four sites investigated. In the UWC case study, we used quantitative methods to track the patterns of access, success and exclusion as illustrated above, and more qualitative methods to observe and explore the affordances and constraints of the 2010 PDC. The research included participant observations and video recordings of the contact sessions and assessment interviews, a peer-review of a sample of the Learning Portfolios, interviews and focus groups with academic staff and participants, including some who elected to leave the course without completing a Learning Portfolio.

### ***Towards a conceptual model of the inner workings of RPL as a specialised pedagogy***

The first phase of the research helped to surface the affordances and constraints of the different practices at each site, but it was in the second phase that we began to work on a conceptual model for understanding what we referred to as the 'inner workings' of RPL as a specialised pedagogy. The model that is described briefly below and at length in Cooper and Ralphs (2016), provides a theoretical language of description for:

(a) understanding what we see as the core business of any RPL policy and practice, namely the assumptions we make about the sources and forms of knowledge produced and distributed within and outside of the university, and

(b) understanding the purposes, methods and configurations of RPL as a specialised form of boundary-crossing pedagogy, for example – as in this case – for navigating access to undergraduate study at university.

The starting point for our engagement with the knowledge question is the principle of differentiation and, specifically, the differences between the knowledge

produced and taught in academic contexts, and forms of experiential knowledge generated in activities and contexts outside of the academy such as small businesses, trade unions or community-based organisations. From a social realist perspective, all scientific knowledge has a social and historical footprint as well as a logical and conceptual structure or set of intrinsic properties that account for its specialisation and explanatory power (Young and Muller, 2016). However, it is the strength or classification (Bernstein, 2000) of the boundaries between the different domains that provides the lens through which to view what counts as knowledge within the different disciplines and specialisations of scientific knowledge.

Boundaries are not arbitrary and, in this sense, they are also central in defining what combinations of knowledge (theoretical and/or practical) are selected or excluded for different curricula and related academic, professional, and vocational qualifications offered at universities, colleges and schools. In some cases, disciplinary boundaries are more porous than others, as Cooper *et al* (2018) found in exploring the reasons why some university and college programmes such as those in the humanities, health and social sciences, are more open (porous boundaries) to the recognition of prior experiential knowledge than others. Qualifications and curricula that are designed with a stronger focus on 'contextual coherence'<sup>30</sup> and closer to the sites of practice, for example, the fourth generation professional qualifications (Muller, 2008) like journalism and tourism, are more inclusive of experiential learning than others.

But while these concepts provide valuable insights into the content, structure and forms of academic and professional knowledge, the question for RPL theory is equally about forms of experiential knowledge that are generated in practices *outside* of the academy, and which differentiate them from the common sense concepts of everyday knowledge. Cooper's (2005) research into trade union knowledge pursued this question, and identified a complex range of linguistic, performance, narrative and written 'tools' for mediating the production and

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<sup>30</sup> When compared to others with a strong 'conceptual coherence'.

distribution of knowledge and skills at all levels and sites of activity in the union. What was significant was the evidence that the unions were recruiting “different forms of knowledge ranging from the local, practical and more analytical and conceptual forms, including elements of highly codified forms of knowledge such as economics and law” (Cooper, 2006:234) and thus reflecting a hybridised combination of everyday knowledge concepts and specialised educational knowledge. These knowledge forms are different from the hierarchical structure and forms of knowledge associated with disciplinary knowledge but are specialised nevertheless within particular contexts.

Cooper (2006)<sup>31</sup> also observed different forms and levels of specialisation within the union. Whilst oral performances and storytelling were the preferred forms of engagement by the rank and file shop stewards, senior union officials valued reading materials and often assumed the role of *boundary workers* in recruiting (selectively) knowledge and information from their mandated participation in courses and other non-union committees and forums. This suggests levels of specialisation that we refer to as *specialised discourses of experiential learning*. We recognised these specialisations in the applicants that sought access to undergraduate study at UWC, albeit from different fields such as Care Workers, Youth Workers and Community Development Workers; Paralegal Advice Practitioners, Micro-Finance and Credit Union Administrators; Health Care Workers; Small Business and Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) Managers and Administrators; Teacher Assistants and Early Childhood Development (ECD) Facilitators. It is this level of specialisation as practitioners within particular contexts that distinguishes people from many other applicants whose discourse is arguably characteristic of everyday discourse (Northedge, 2003) with little indication that they are ready to engage with the specialised and largely text-based discourse of the university.

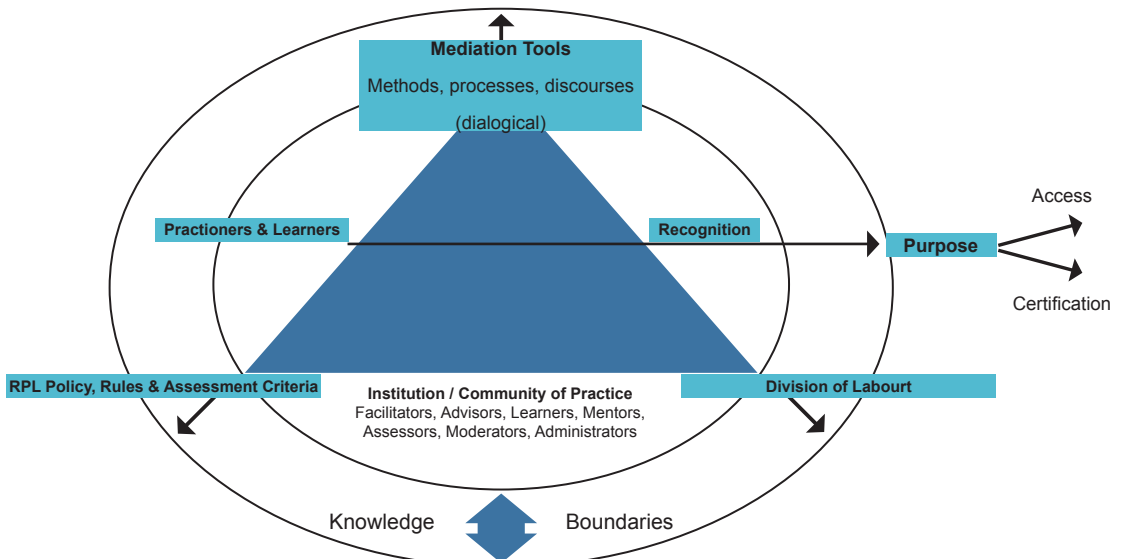
Which brings us to the proposition of RPL as a form of boundary pedagogy situated between these different but related specialised discourses of academic

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<sup>31</sup> Cooper explores this concept of specialisation in more detail in a forthcoming book.

and experiential learning. Hence, our attraction to the concepts and framework associated with the post-Vygotskian Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), which we adapted for theorising the transitional nature and dual orientation of the curriculum and pedagogical activities involved in the RPL process. Conceptually, the RPL curriculum looks ‘both ways’ – that is, to the sources of knowledge and skills on either side of the academic/ experiential learning boundary, as a basis for the selection and sequencing of concepts and methods (mediation tools) that characterise the pedagogical objective and process of portfolio building and assessment.

Figure 3 below illustrates the distinctive features that characterise the inner workings and dynamic artistry of RPL as a specialised pedagogy bounded by particular rules and divisions of labour. We discuss and reflect on this RPL application of the CHAT model (hereinafter referred to as *the model*), in more detail below.



**Figure 3: RPL as a specialised pedagogy – inner workings, relations, and artistry (Adapted from Cooper and Ralphs, 2016:136)**

Vygotsky's (1978) concepts of *mediation tools* and the *zone of proximal development* provide useful starting points for exploring the *dialectical and expansive* nature of learning that becomes possible within the *zone* of the RPL Portfolio Development Course, where facilitators, participants and mentors are able to assert *pedagogic agency* in relation to the shared *object/ purpose* of the course. We characterise the dialectical nature of this zone as space within which the narrative discourses of experiential learning encounter the more text-based practices of academic discourse. The zone is where the *recontextualisation* of experiential learning is theorised as both the process and the outcome of the interactions between facilitators, mentors and participants in these transitional *communities of practice*. These interactions and the methods (tools) used are designed to mediate access to a carefully selected and sequenced set of higher order concepts<sup>32</sup> (navigation tools) that make up the RPL curriculum (see Figure 4). Through this curriculum, participants are oriented to the purposes, methods and literacies of the two primary discourses: narrative and academic ways of knowing and the relation between the two. We refer to these concepts as *navigation tools*, as they are designed to provide competent users with the insights and flexibility they need to navigate the *assessment rules for access* into the discourse communities (faculties) of the university.

In practice however, participants, facilitators, mentors and assessment panels collaborate to give shape and form to the whole programme – what we refer to as the *artistry of the RPL practice*. Artistry in this sense is at the conceptual heart of the inner workings of RPL as a specialised pedagogy. This pedagogy refers in one sense to the dynamic combination of social, regulatory and pedagogical relations that constitute the coherence and momentum of the practice as a whole and, in another sense, to the dialectical nature of the contradictions that serve as the 'driving force of transformation' and change (Engestrom and Sannino, 2010) in the programme as a whole.

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<sup>32</sup> In Adult Education, the sociology of knowledge, narrative learning theory and academic literacy.

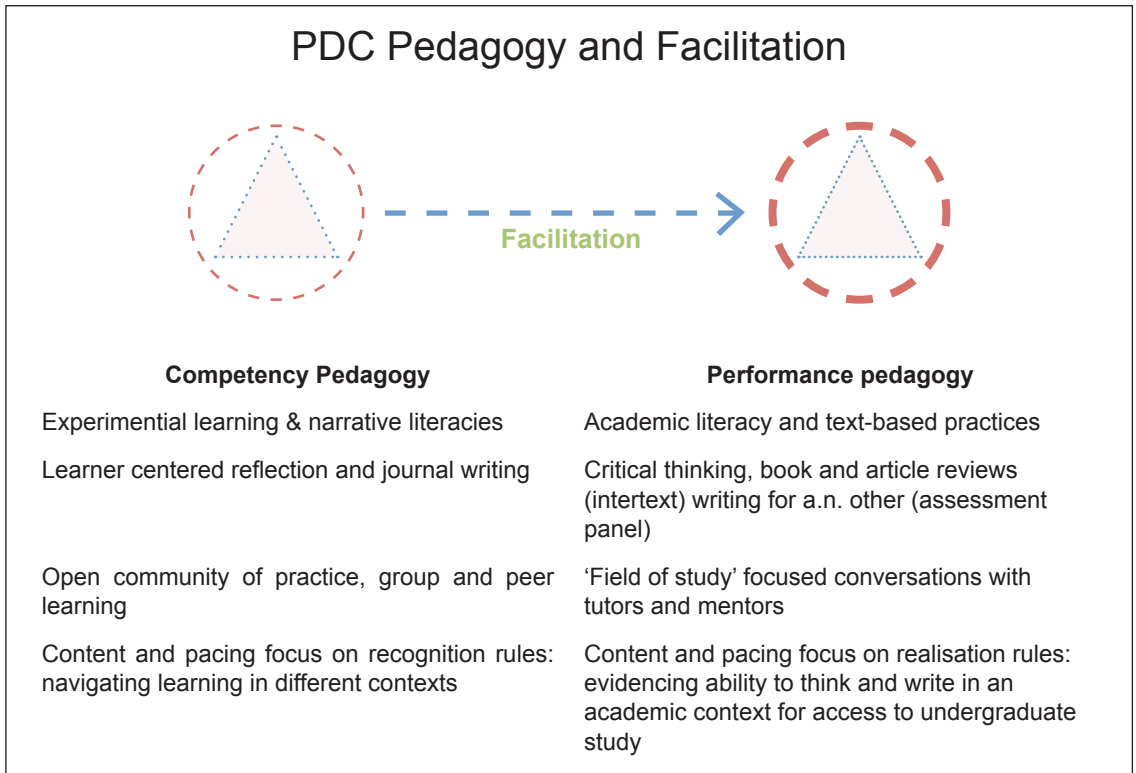
This brings us back to Osman's (2003) 'knowledge paradox' that we referred to earlier, and which is arguably still central to the transformative energy that continues to drive the search for a more optimal and inclusive RPL programme at the university. We reflect briefly on this artistry in the next section, with specific reference to facilitation and mentoring, and other aspects of the RPL programme.

### ***RPL and the artistry of facilitation***

Facilitation is no stranger in adult education theory and is often contrasted with teaching in formal education. Facilitation requires a focus on learning and learning processes rather than on teaching a given subject (Tight, 1996), and on adult learners taking responsibility for their learning (Knowles *et al* 1998). In Mezirow's (1990) theory of transformative learning, facilitation means starting with the learner's experience and building theory through critical reflection and action. Our stance as RPL facilitators of the PDC resonates with all of the above, but also with our more formal academic role of steering the programme from experiential and narrative modes of learning (competence pedagogy<sup>33</sup>) into the academic and text-based practices associated with the article review and literature search (performance pedagogy) as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

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<sup>33</sup> Bernstein (2000) distinguishes between competence and performance pedagogies, where the former is classically a learner-centred process and the latter much more directed towards given standards and firm control over the selection and pacing of activities by the facilitator.



**Figure 4: Navigational model – UWC Portfolio Development Course (PDC)**

Our reflections below are provided as an indication of how *the model* of specialised pedagogy spoke to our experience in the course and how in turn, we view the artistry of facilitation questions we ask ourselves, about how to make our contributions more effective.

Alan Ralphs (AR) has a background of many years in school teaching and Adult Education, and took on the task of RPL Programme Coordinator and researcher at UWC, in 2005. He retired in 2018. Nigel Prinsloo (NP) is a lecturer and researcher in the Institute for Post School Studies (IPSS) at UWC, with substantial experience in Adult Education as a Mathematics teacher. He joined the PDC programme initially as a participant observer/ researcher on the 2010 course, and has been a co-facilitator with AR from 2012 onwards. Our reflection is offered as a *coda* to the historical and theoretical discussion of the UWC case study presented in this article.

For NP, the model and specifically the concept of mediation tools, speaks clearly to his background as an adult educator grounded in the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire and the reflective practices of Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning. NP explains that the academic literacy competence of participants on the PDC was driven through these reflective processes and principles, such that the often-hidden experience, competencies and skills were made visible through the writing processes in the RPL programme. Through reflective practice and the interplay between lectures, group activities and individual tasks, candidates learn to navigate from a more reflective experiential focus to the more text-based reading and writing skills focus of the university.

For AR, the most challenging and creative part of the facilitator's role lies in trying to find the most effective ways to mediate access to the theoretical concepts<sup>34</sup> behind the construction of the Learning Portfolio without dumbing down the theory or resorting to the monological, text-based modes of lecturing. Such undermine participants' active grappling with these concepts in relation to their own repertoires of prior knowledge and experiential learning.

The conception of the *boundary worker* in Engeström *et al* (1995) is an apt description of how NP sees the role of the RPL practitioner in spanning the boundary between the experience of the candidate, and the requirements of the academy. This conception resonates with a metaphor of the PDC as a *construction bridge* (Michelson and Mandell, 2004) and the artistry of the facilitator's mediation of these boundary-crossing pedagogies. For AR, this is not an uncomplicated role to play as there are epistemological and academic, cultural and ideological affordances and constraints to be encountered on both sides of the boundary.

The advent of digital technologies and online learning requires a dynamic and not static metaphor of the boundary worker or the constructive bridge and, likewise, the model of RPL as a specialised pedagogy. The introduction of

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<sup>34</sup> For example Kolb's (1984) Learning Cycle and Inventory of Learning Styles, Bruner's (1986) distinction between narrative and paradigmatic ways of knowing, Mezirow's (1990) theory of critical thinking and transformative learning, *etcetera*.

*eLearning* applications into the PDC signals a formidable change in the nature and form of the mediation tools (methods) used by facilitators and participants in the preparation of their Learning Portfolios. It cannot be seen in isolation from the other dimensions of the model, not least of all as NP suggests, in its relation to the philosophy of access and redress that underpins the RPL for access project at UWC.

The role of the facilitators on the PDC is crucial to the formation and animation of a sense of *community* and shared commitment to the objectives and processes of the programme. We use a range of strategies to enable this aspect of the programme, from the welcoming ritual at the start of the course, to the design of group tasks and debates, shared reflective activities based on journal writing at the beginning of each session and, as the contact sessions end, an introduction to the mentors and senior students who will orient participants into their future discipline-based discourse communities. The challenge of the artistry in this space is how to model and keep the balance between our multiple identities in the social and pedagogical roles of facilitator, lecturer, mentor and community builder. NP adds to this analysis, a reminder of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the *expert other* and how we learn from the practices and partnerships with others, including those who work with RPL-related practices and research in other universities, colleges and organisations.

### ***RPL and the art of mentoring in an African academic context***

Mentoring occupies a distinctive place in the artistry of RPL as a specialised pedagogical practice, most notably in providing guidance and support for candidates as they commence work on their Learning Portfolios for final submission and assessment. The introduction of mentors to learners on the PDC takes place in the middle, just before the course switches to a focus on academic literacies and related activities. Learners are assigned to mentors who have postgraduate qualifications in the learners' proposed fields of study. Learners are entitled to three hours of their mentors' time, inclusive of face-to-face consultations, email correspondence, and social media communications.

Mentoring, in this sense, is a complex oral, relational and text-based activity with a firm focus on the production of each section of the Learning Portfolio and the pending encounter with a faculty-based assessment panel. In Vygotskian terms, mentoring is a complex socio-cultural form of mediation in which learners are supported in transitioning from a predominantly experiential learning discourse, into academic discourse. The mentoring relationship ends when the Learning Portfolio is ready for submission, with the *proviso* that the mentor, in consultation with other mentors in the RPL team, may counsel against submission if s/he believes it does not yet meet the standards required.

Mentoring is typically thought of as a form of *dialogic mediation* in contrast to *monologic teaching*<sup>35</sup>, but as Pokorny (2012) points out in her research it is the way that mentors engage in dialogue, that distinguishes the experiences of mentees, as being inclusive or exclusive. Pokorny (2012:129) following Lillis (2003), distinguishes between a “transformative process of negotiated meaning-making” where learners feel adequately valued and recognised for their agency and expertise – and a predominantly normative form of dialogue that focuses on “modelling, talking and doing RPL in the culture of the academic community”, where learners feel undervalued and unrecognised for their knowledge and expertise. We take up this theme in the reflective discussion with Rethabile Mcube (RM), who has been a mentor on the PDC for the last three years.

RM is a staff member in the RPL Office at UWC, where she holds an administrator’s post with advising and mentoring responsibilities. She is herself a graduate of the 2010 PDC, after which she read Philosophy and History for her Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree and is now working towards completing a Postgraduate Diploma in Adult Education.

RM reflects on her efforts to introduce a *communal mentoring style* consistent with her roots in rural community life, her knowledge as a postgraduate student, and her intuitive connections to African spirituality. She was the first to introduce

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<sup>35</sup> In other words mentoring is thought of as a two-way rather than a one-directional process.

communal or group mentoring sessions in addition to the individualised sessions that she still offers, and which have been the norm since the PDC was first started in 2001. RM describes this approach to mentoring as one that is based on the central tenets of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*. That is, consensus building, dialogue and spirituality (Nafukho, 2011), where the mentor consciously seeks to generate a shared space, where people can connect with who they are on a spiritual level – regardless of how challenging things get in socio-economic terms.

Group mentoring sessions are structured with these foci, to cover each section of the Learning Portfolio. RM makes the point that whilst seeking to affirm and strengthen collaborative ways of learning, individual attention is provided where needed, along with clear guidelines and firm support for mentees, some of whom feel really intimidated by the university environment. She illustrates this point with reference to Michelson's (2011; 2015) seminal literary critique of the fictional genre (*Bildungsroman*) of autobiographical narratives that characterise the essays of experiential learning found in RPL Learning Portfolios around the world.

Narratives, in both the writing and the reading – are not responses to society but, rather, social practices within it, practices that impose a particular conception of society and a particular way of constituting the self (Michelson, 2011:203)

Reflecting on this argument, RM suggests that it is important to distinguish between notions of selfhood and identity in the general sense, and selfhood for the person who is trying to enter another world and, in this case, the academic world. Learners applying for access to university need to be clear about the entry-level demands, challenges and expectations of Higher Education – and must therefore evidence an ability to write, structure, and edit, their autobiographical learning histories accordingly. Mentors in turn, must understand the need to guide candidates to have structure, themes and coherence in their narration, but not take away the life events that took place.

Lest we mistakenly read this reflection as an indication that Afrocentric mentoring is free of the challenges of blending these different approaches to learning, RM offers the following description of traditional beer making, *Umqombothi*, as a metaphor for the complex artistry involved.

We can think about the RPL process at UWC as how we make *Umqombothi*. When making this South African traditional beer, one needs to combine dry ingredients – grains and fermented grains that are turned into powder. Then cook this mixture, with just the right fire and stirring, and then simmer while also keeping an eye on it to ensure that the porridge is not too weak or too thick, and that it has no lumps. Once it is well cooked, the porridge is put aside to cool off. Then a natural yeast is added, and after a few days or overnight depending on the warmth of the house it is put in, the beer is almost ready. Then it gets sifted and becomes a traditional beer. The people who prepare this beer have to wear specific clothing depending on the occasion. *Umqombothi* is mostly made to appease Ancestors or for a celebration of some sort.

Similarly, in the RPL process, we get applicants who meet the minimum requirements set by UWC. After their applications go through the selection process that leads to the pre-selection tests, they proceed to PDC classes. At this stage, the mentoring sessions are introduced. As mentors, we get to act as cooks – we stir, keep the fire burning just well enough not to burn the mixture, and then allow it to simmer. This stage is when we guide, discipline, and support our candidates. Most people hope that because our candidates are older than 23 years of age, they know what is to be done. However, in reality we need to give them guidance and support because in most cases, they feel intimidated by the university environment. Once they become students, they access the potential to contribute academically to our nation.

RM's case for an Afrocentric grounding of mentoring practices reminds us of the cultural and historical nature of mediation tools, the selection and effectiveness of which varies according to the specific purposes of the RPL curriculum, as well as the preferences, languages and cultures of the mentors and mentees

involved. This opens up an interesting line of enquiry for future research – on RPL mentoring in an African academic context – hopefully that will add to the search for more inclusive and effective RPL practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our aim in this article was twofold: to provide a brief historical overview of the growth and development of the RPL-for-access programme at UWC in the period from 2001 to 2018; and secondly, to describe and reflect on the conceptual work we have done to improve our understanding and analysis of the affordances and the constraints of the practice.

The historical narrative highlights the value of a robust institutional base in policy and systems development, plus a dedicated unit with a clear mandate and funding to build the programmes and services required. What it also highlights is the unexpected scale of growth of the public interest in the programme once it got underway, and which required additional advice, information and pre-selection procedures to manage, but which has become unsustainable without further funding.

The conceptual thread in our narrative has been a distinctive feature from the outset and is arguably the real basis for the ‘success’ of the programme that, on the face of it, continues to struggle with low rates of admission in relation to applications. The value of a funded research partnership with SAQA from 2009 to 2015 cannot be underestimated, most notably for the collaboration with colleagues from three other research sites for building a conceptual model with which to deepen our understanding of the ‘inner workings’ of our RPL practices.

The model has two dimensions. Firstly, it has a language of description for understanding the assumptions we make about the forms, specialisations and comparability of academic qualifications and experiential learning in an RPL context. Secondly, it has the complex dimensions and artistry of RPL as a specialised pedagogical practice for supporting candidates as they navigate the boundaries and transition between the experiential and academic discourse

communities. Our reflection in this article on the art of RPL-focused facilitation and mentoring<sup>36</sup> indicates the explanatory value of the model as well as avenues for further empirical and conceptual work. Our argument in this paper is that RPL programmes and services have become increasingly specialised and thus require dedicated staff and resources in order to grapple with these challenges and maintain the standards and quality of provision in the face of growing demands across the post-school system in South Africa.

The provision for RPL policy, programmes and services at South African public universities has made steady progress over the last 10 years, but there is no guarantee of progress going forward. For, although the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published its first policy on RPL in 2016, RPL remains an unfunded mandate at public universities in South Africa. Similarly in the TVET and Community Colleges, where the gap between policy and implementation is exacerbated by a lack of adequate funding (Prinsloo, 2009). These constraints are essentially prohibitive of any attempts to escalate the scale and quality of provision that is required – other than pushing fees up to levels where only a few would benefit, or attempting to digitise the practice with obvious consequences for those who do not have access to online learning resources and support.

Notwithstanding this formidable constraint, the progress made by RPL practitioners, administrators and researchers means that the case has been made for the viability, credibility and quality of RPL-based admissions, articulation and exemptions taking place at a small number of universities and colleges in South Africa. The challenge going forward is how to sustain and grow the centres of excellence and, crucially, how to provide a more comprehensive set of information and advisory services between and across the learning pathways of the post-school system of education and training.

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<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, space constraints have not allowed us to include a reflection on the assessment practices associated with the PDC and TAPs, but this is available in the full case study report (Ralphs and Associates, 2012) and in the book (Cooper and Ralphs, 2016:69).

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# PAPER 2



# Quest for Lifelong Learning: The Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at a University of Technology (UoT) in South Africa

*Ms Frederika de Graaff and Dr Barbara Jones*

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## ABSTRACT

The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) has since 2005, made provision for entry into the university through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), the granting of exemption(s) towards specific subjects in a qualification, and advanced standing into postgraduate qualifications. This paper reflects on the implementation of RPL as a practice at CPUT from 2006 to 2017. The paper explains the approach taken to build capacity among academic staff dealing with RPL. Developing the 'know-how' as RPL practitioners results in planned and qualification-specific processes which enable the institution to provide for all forms of RPL. Finally, the paper reflects on the successes of RPL students, and the learning trajectories that the processes have enabled some to follow. The findings of the related investigation support the underpinning philosophy of RPL, and the promotion of lifelong learning and social justice.

## INTRODUCTION

Globalisation and changing socio-economic and cultural conditions have impacted on education globally, and the development of qualifications frameworks worldwide has contributed to the formalisation of all forms of education and training. These changes have impacted on RPL because the "interpretations of learning have become extended" (Harris, 2006:2-3) to include formal, informal and/or non-formal learning. This flexibility enables adults to receive recognition for their existing knowledge, thereby enhancing their employability and contributing to the development of society.

It is argued by Michelson and Mandel (2004) that RPL is part of these changes, creating a bridge or mechanism through which Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can reach out to constituencies that have been underserved or entirely excluded from Further or Higher Education in South Africa. Globally RPL is integral to the discourses of lifelong learning. In South Africa, RPL has become embedded in educational policies and legislation that followed the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 1995.

## **THE RESEARCH ON, AND LEGAL ENVIRONMENT OF, RPL IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Various initiatives have been undertaken both internationally and locally to develop sound understandings of RPL. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2007) undertook an international comparison of RPL practice, and found that South Africa had 'islands of excellent practices' in some institutions where RPL was well implemented.

Locally, research was undertaken through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (2009-2015) to deepen understandings of RPL as a practice. SAQA also hosted two conferences (held in 2011 and 2014), to share information on RPL implementation, quality assurance and resourcing on one hand, and on RPL 'tools and templates' on the other. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) appointed an RPL Task Team in 2012, to address the remaining legal barriers to RPL. Amongst its findings (Ministerial Task Team Report on RPL, 2013) were the following.

- Acknowledging the complex relationships between different forms of knowledge and their associated learning pathways, and that RPL practices can mediate these contradictions in constructive and emancipatory ways. This can take place through specialised engagements with the structures, institutions and practitioners responsible for the articulation of qualifications, curriculum development and programme delivery.

- RPL plays a vital role in identifying skills that exist in the workplace, in creating learning pathways where there are gaps, and in distinguishing between an actual ‘skills gap’ and a ‘recognition gap’.

Following this work, two policies on RPL were promulgated, which can commonly be referred to as ‘RPL implementation policy’ (SAQA, 2013; 2016; 2019) and ‘RPL coordination policy’ (DHET, 2016). In addition, the Council on Higher Education (CHE)<sup>37</sup> published policy for RPL, Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), and Assessment in Higher Education (CHE, 2016) that is in line and contextualised with the legislation.

These developments at the national level provide guidance for the strategies and structures of institutions such as CPUT, to provide RPL. The roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved in the RPL process are clarified and underpinned by an understanding of RPL in the holistic context of lifelong learning.

RPL is about the awarding of ‘status’ (CHE, 2016). The term ‘status’ is used to indicate the level of the NQF at which the RPL applicant can receive recognition. In terms of the national policy, provision can be made for two types of RPL under the umbrella term ‘advanced standing’. “Advanced standing is the status granted to an applicant for admission to study at a higher level than the candidate’s prior knowledge and skills and/or formal studies would have allowed, including exemption where applicable” (CHE, 2016:3). From this description, the following types of RPL are provided for.

- *Access into first-year.* This is a process where an RPL application is evaluated against the entry requirements for first-year study (CHE, 2016:8 [Clause 4.2.4]).

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<sup>37</sup> In South Africa, there are three National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Sub-Frameworks, for General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education, and Occupational Qualifications respectively. The CHE is one of three Quality Councils, which oversee these NQF Sub-Frameworks; it oversees the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF).

- *Advanced standing.* Applicants who seek access to post-diploma or postgraduate studies in a particular field or discipline, but do not hold an appropriate first degree or diploma in that field or discipline, may be given access to the qualification through an RPL process. These applicants can be granted advanced standing (or status) into the qualification in question, but without the award of the primary qualification (CHE, 2016: 9 [Clause 4.2.7]).
- *Exemptions – RPL.* Informal and non-formal knowledge may be recruited and evaluated through an RPL process against modules/subjects within a qualification, but this may not exceed 50% of the programme. The assessment must be done by subject experts within the field or discipline (CHE, 2016:9 [Clause 4.2.9])<sup>38</sup>.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF RPL AT CPUT

RPL requires HEIs not only to rethink the processes entailed in admitting students via non-traditional routes, but also the assessment of RPL applications. CPUT has always acknowledged that RPL is an academic process, and RPL assessment and decisions have been left to the academic departments. In 2005, CPUT decided to place RPL within its academic development unit – the Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) – and appointed an RPL lecturer to implement, coordinate and quality assure the RPL processes at the institution. CPUT’s RPL implementation process has been reviewed from time to time over the past twelve years, resulting in a qualification-specific process, which is explained further in the following sections of this paper.

### ***RPL capacity-building for academic staff members***

As a University of Technology (UoT), CPUT focuses on preparing students for specific professions with curricula geared towards the workplace and pro-

<sup>38</sup> SAQA (2013; 2016; 2019) and DHET (2016) RPL policies do not limit the credit through RPL, to 50%.

fessional requirements in specific fields, “specialising in multi-disciplinary teaching and application of knowledge” (Reddy, 2006:34). Working within this paradigm enables the university to accommodate RPL applicants with relevant workplace learning.

This is, however, not a straightforward process, and the CHE’s (2016:6) RPL policy makes provision for the “RPL practitioner: a person [who] functions in one or more aspects of RPL provision including policy development, advice, portfolio course design and facilitation, assessment and moderation, administration, monitoring and evaluation, research and development”.

Realising the importance of training academic staff for this spectrum of specialist RPL practices, practitioners at the forefront of RPL research and practice in the Western Cape developed an RPL training programme. This has taken the form of an elective module on RPL as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (Teaching and Development) – an NQF Level 8 qualification. CPUT has been running this as a stand-alone module for all academic staff involved with RPL since 2014. In 2017, it was offered through the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), facilitated by RPL practitioners from CPUT and the universities of the Western Cape (UWC) and Cape Town (UCT). The programme aims to develop academics’ understanding of RPL and the education philosophies underpinning the practice. As part of the programme, academic departments develop detailed RPL plans for their qualifications.

### ***Knowledge claims in RPL***

In the RPL training programme, consideration is given to the development of a knowledge claim, a concept which was developed in a Master of Education (MEd) study (de Graaff, 2014) that set out to unpack the knowledge an RPL applicant claims to have, compared to knowledge components within the qualification.

Making a knowledge claim requires one to analyse and compare different types of knowledge that relate to the same topic. Different types of knowledge (for instance, propositional and procedural knowledge as advanced by Bernstein,

1999) follow different structural developments, depending on the specific field or discipline<sup>39</sup>. The more hierarchically structured the knowledge is, the more formal learning is required. However, knowledge that is more horizontal in structure can be acquired in a variety of ways, including through non-formal and informal learning. In general, therefore, more RPL applications are made and granted in fields where knowledge is predominantly horizontally structured, such as for qualifications in the Faculty of Business Management Sciences at CPUT.

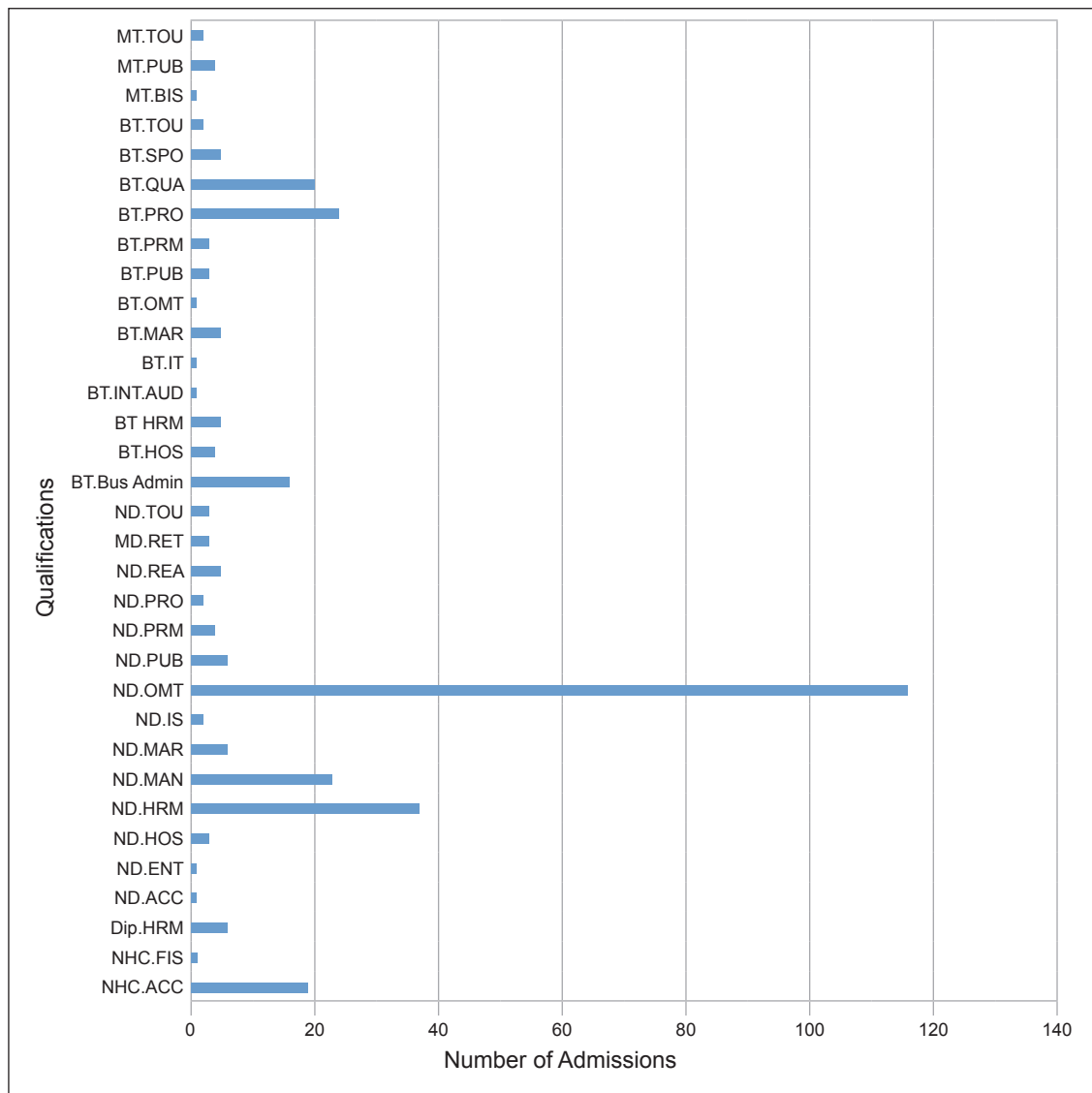
To illustrate this point, a statistical analysis of RPL candidates who were admitted and registered at CPUT in the period 2006-2018, showed that 336 candidates were admitted to various programmes in the Faculty of Business Management Sciences – the faculty thought to have the greatest number of RPL candidates. These comprised candidates granted access into the first-year of undergraduate study, or advanced standing into post-diploma studies, as well as those exempt from certain subjects such as Communication, Management 1, Industrial Relations 1, Project Management 1 and Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) when they had appropriate work experience, particularly for the National Diploma in Office Management and Technology (ND:OMT). Figure 1 provides an overview of the numbers of RPL candidates admitted into programmes in this Faculty.

### ***Academic departments and RPL***

During the early years of RPL at CPUT (that is, pre-2012), the evaluation of RPL applications followed a generic process for all faculties. However, some of the academic departments started to adapt the generic approach to their own, more qualification-specific requirements. In the light of these changes the concept of an 'RPL plan' was introduced, enabling each academic department to develop its approach to RPL, in line with its disciplines and/or professions.

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<sup>39</sup> Bernstein (1999) writes of 'vertical' and 'horizontal' discourse. He describes 'vertical discourses' as 'systemically principled', while 'horizontal discourse is 'local', 'context dependent', 'commonsense and everyday' knowledge.



**Figure 1: RPL admissions into the Faculty of Business Management Sciences at CPUT, 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)<sup>40</sup>**

<sup>40</sup> BT=Bachelor of Technology, MT=Master of Technology, ND=National Diploma, NHC=National Higher Certificate (These are all 'old' HEQSF qualifications. The new qualifications have been introduced from 2018), TOU=Tourism Management, PUB=Public Administration, BIS=Business and Information Administration, SPO=Sport and Leisure Management, PRO/PRM=Project Management, OMT=Office Management and Technology, MAR=Marketing, IT=Information Technology, INT.AUD=Internal Auditing, HOS=Hospitality, RET=Retail, REA=Real Estate, IS=Information Systems, MAN=Management, HRM=Human Resource Management, ENT=Entrepreneurship, ACC=Accounting, FIS=Financial Information Systems.

By developing an RPL plan, the academic department decides to accept RPL applications and prepares itself for receiving and processing these applications. RPL plans include the following:

- a description of the information required from RPL applicants, such as a letter of motivation for applying for RPL, supporting documentation including a screening questionnaire and Curriculum Vitae (CV), work references, *etcetera*;
- the RPL process to be followed for the development and assessment of RPL submissions. Some academic departments opt for tests, some for portfolios, while others prefer an interview and/or demonstration or a combination of these;
- tests and marking memos, if required, according to the plan;
- learning outcomes and an evidence grid for RPL, or exemption applications in the case of a returning student (who has an incomplete qualification); and
- an indication of what constitutes sufficient evidence, and the standards of competences required.

The next step in the RPL process is to screen all the information provided, to ascertain whether it is sufficient. A decision on the relevance of the experience described and possible knowledge acquired, as well as the applicant's interests in the specific field of study, follows. The academic department looks back – 'retrospectively' – at knowledge gained, but also forward – 'prospectively' – at the potential of the applicant to succeed (Shalem and Steinberg, 2006). This reflection process is used to determine the feasibility of an RPL application. If deemed feasible, the applicant is invited to participate in the rest of the RPL process.

## **PROVIDING EVIDENCE IN THE RPL PROCESS**

Making knowledge visible and explicit is the major challenge in any RPL application process. Selecting evidence that will enable both the applicant and the academic staff to recognise the relevant knowledge is a process of teaching

and learning, and mediating the knowledge claims between the workplace and the academy (Cooper *et al* 2016).

### ***Evidence for access***

Most RPL applications are for access into the first year of an undergraduate qualification, and necessitate the evaluation of the applicants' knowledge against the entry requirements of the qualification. This usually involves ascertaining the applicants' competences in English and Mathematics, or Mathematical Literacy. For the Faculty of Health and Wellness at CPUT for example, the entry requirements also include a certain level of knowledge of the Life Sciences and/ or Physics.

In the Faculty of Health and Wellness, the decision was made to improve the knowledge of RPL candidates in these areas, as part of the RPL process. To this end, workshops have been held in Mathematics and Life Sciences for Nursing and, in addition to these, Physics has been included for Emergency Medical Care (EMC) applicants. The workshops are offered over four weeks, and culminate in formal tests.

These workshops also provide an opportunity for the RPL candidates to prepare for studies within Higher Education, as they are usually mature adults who have not been involved in formal studies for a long time. The candidates may have completed short courses for professional development but in many instances, these courses are more practical in nature than theoretical.

In past years, applicants with low matric (school Grade 12) marks could enter the Nursing or Paramedic professions, complete various courses accredited with the respective professional bodies, and work in hospitals or Emergency Medical Services (EMC). However, these individuals are now required in the case of Paramedics, or strongly encouraged in the case of Nurses, to complete formal qualifications. The RPL applicants for Nursing and EMC are required to be working as either Staff, Registered Nurses or Paramedics, respectively.

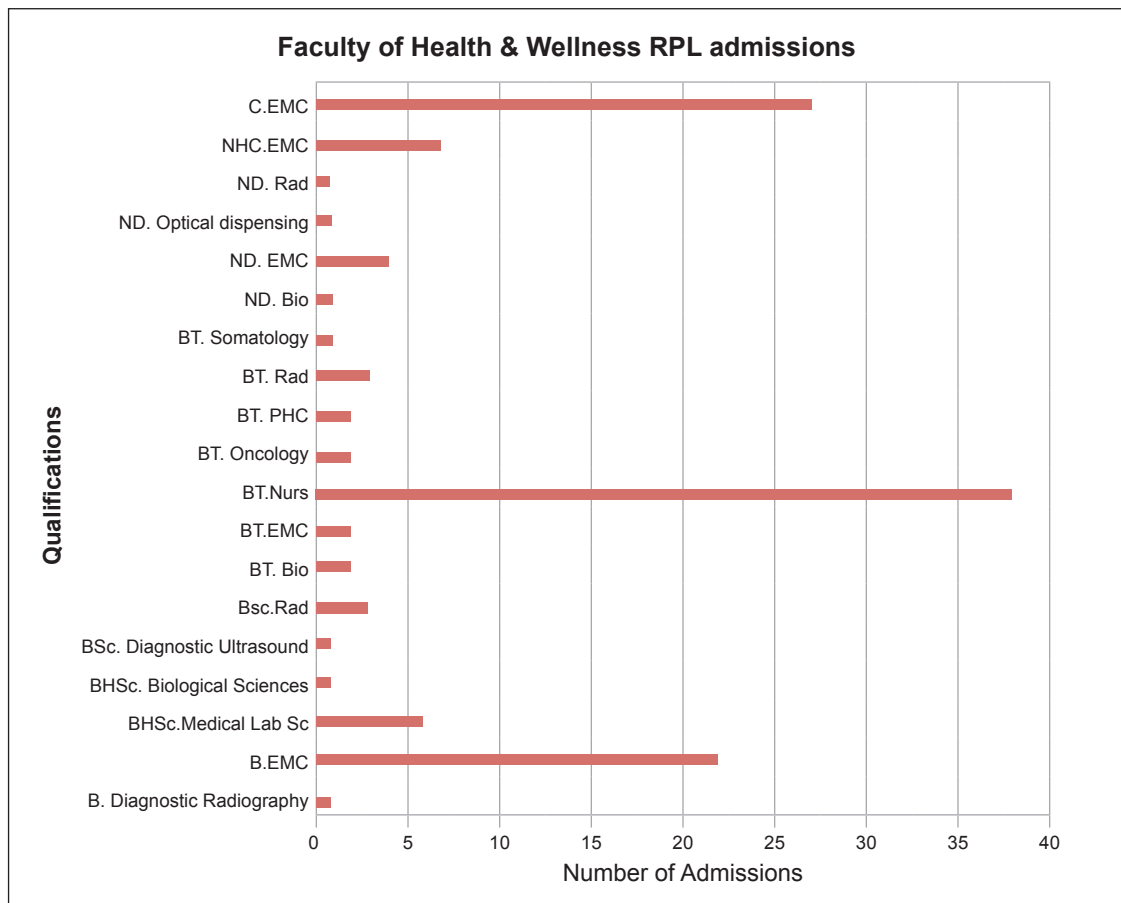
Figure 2 shows that most of the RPL admissions to the Faculty of Health and Wellness were for EMC qualifications: the National Higher Certificate (NHC), Certificate (C), National Diploma (ND), and Bachelor's Degree (B). There have also been significant numbers admitted to the B Tech (BT) Nursing, the Bachelor's in Health Science (B HSc), and Medical Laboratory Sciences.

### ***Building evidence for credits***

Evaluating knowledge gained in the workplace specifically to grant exemptions through the RPL process is another type of RPL that CPUT undertakes. This type of RPL provides a unique set of challenges for both RPL applicants and academic staff members. It requires all parties involved to compare the types and forms of knowledge within academia, with knowledge from the workplace.

How CPUT attempts to address this challenge is by using an 'RPL Exemption Grid' based on the curriculum of the 'destination' qualification and the learning outcomes of its specific subjects. The relevant academic department first has to decide if the subject is at all 'RPL-able', and whether sufficient conceptual knowledge of the subject can be acquired in the workplace or not. The nature of the discipline and profession, the nature of the work and the requirements for the application of knowledge, influence this decision.

Aspects that academics will consider, and that tend to be more 'RPL-able', are topics and related activities that are regularly discussed in meetings and applied within a team or organisational setting (Cooper and Harris, 2013). For example, Economics has a strong theoretical base, and this is unlikely to form part of regular workplace discussions, although knowledge of economics can be gained through self-study, general awareness, and a motivation to know and understand the subject. However, a subject such as Industrial Relations or Management is more practice-oriented with an emphasis on procedures, and knowledge in these fields can be much more readily gained in the workplace through discussions with colleagues, as well as through in-house training programmes and short courses.



**Figure 2: RPL in the Faculty of Health and Wellness at CPUT, 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)<sup>41</sup>**

## RPL grid

During the process of developing the RPL grid, academics analyse the learning in the formal programme from a workplace perspective, taking workflow and naturally occurring evidence into account. The grid enables the RPL applicant to link his/her work and associated knowledge with the learning objectives, and present evidence of learning against the learning objectives in the grid. Relating

<sup>41</sup> B=Bachelor's Degree, BHSc=bachelor of Health Sciences, BSc=Bachelor of Science, BT=Bachelor of Technology, C=Certificate, ND=National Diploma, NHC=National Higher Certificate. EMC=Emergency Medical Care, Medical Lab Sc=Medical Laboratory Sciences, Nurs=Nursing, PHC=Primary Health Care, Rad=Radiology.

the order of workflow to the pedagogical flow/ curricular progression of the subject enables both the academic staff member and the RPL applicant to develop their own knowledge claims.

### **Portfolio-building workshops**

In the last few years, the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences (FB&MS) has initiated portfolio-building workshops to assist the RPL applicants in making their tacit knowledge explicit. This requires a specialised pedagogy, a process of “bringing different sources of knowledge and forms of learning into a shared discursive space where comparisons and judgements can be made” (Cooper *et al* 2016:29). Academics may also request reflective writing from the candidates at logical points within the workflow/ progression of work in the RPL process. During the workshops applicants are assisted with reflective writing, and mediating their knowledge from the workplace and linking it to the learning outcomes.

### **Advanced standing**

CPUT makes provision to accommodate the new and advanced knowledge of RPL applicants by granting ‘advanced standing’ in post-diploma studies, as appropriate for the knowledge levels demonstrated in the RPL application. Examples of the types of qualifications where this has taken place include the B Tech (only up to the 2019 intake) and Master’s-level studies. In future, advanced standing will be possible in the new Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)-aligned Advanced Diploma and Postgraduate Diploma<sup>42</sup>.

RPL for advanced standing requires the RPL assessment to evaluate the knowledge of the RPL applicant on the NQF level below that of the qualification into which the person is seeking entry. For example, if an applicant has a

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<sup>42</sup> The NQF in South Africa comprises three coordinated NQF Sub-Frameworks – for General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education, and Occupational Qualifications respectively.

B Tech (NQF Level 7) and considerable relevant work experience, the person can apply for advanced standing into a Postgraduate Diploma (at NQF Level 8) or even a Master's Degree (at NQF Level 9). The RPL application is then assessed against the preceding qualification – the Advanced Diploma (NQF Level 7) or an Honours Degree (NQF Level 8), respectively. Each of these RPL applications requires a comprehensive portfolio, detailed reflective writing, and a research proposal. It is a time-consuming process for the applicant; it can take more than a year to complete. The academic(s) involved in such an application assist the applicants with reflective writing and the research proposal for the RPL application.

### ***Assessing RPL applications***

The challenge that academics grapple with is how to assess the knowledge presented in an RPL application; how to know if this knowledge is equivalent to the academic requirements.

To address these challenges a standard 'assessor report' is used and the basic principles of assessment – namely validity, authenticity, currency and sufficiency of evidence – are used as indicators. The assessor report is compiled by the subject experts concerned, in consultation with other academics within the academic department involved.

The assessor report documents the type of RPL used, the qualification applied for, a description of the learning required to be in place (that is, entry requirements), and/or the learning outcomes of a subject. In the report, a list of the evidence is provided, and a brief discussion of its relevance is given, which may be supported by the appended evidence. The learning of the applicant is interpreted from the evidence presented, and evaluated in terms of the knowledge gap that has been (or has not been) bridged through the process.

A motivation or a rationale is provided for granting the RPL that was requested or, in the case of unsuccessful applications, the reasons for not approving the

application. If the application is successful a recommendation is made by the academic department and the decision explained. Unsuccessful applicants are advised on possible options for the way forward. The assessment process is moderated either by the Head of Department or by the moderators used in the formal learning programme. The CPUT Senate, on the recommendation of the academic department, the faculty, and the RPL unit, gives the final approval of the RPL application.

## **STATISTICS ON RPL ADMISSIONS AT CPUT, 2006-2017**

During the first twelve years of RPL implementation at CPUT, 675 RPL candidates were admitted<sup>43</sup>, but the uptake varied considerably across faculties, as illustrated in Figure 3.

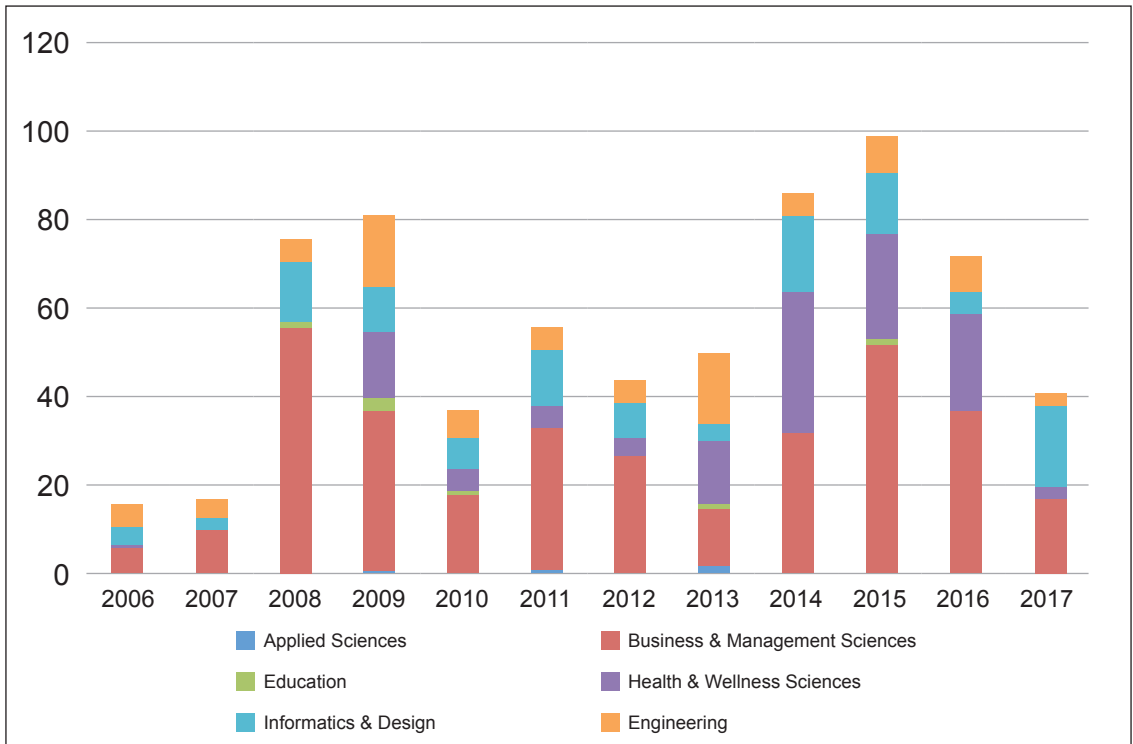
The CPUT Faculties of Education and Applied Sciences had the lowest numbers of RPL candidate admissions in the 2006-2017 period (seven and four admissions respectively). The Faculties of Business and Management Sciences (336); Health and Wellness (125); Informatics and Design (118), and Engineering (85) had far higher numbers. These figures support the view of Cooper and Harris (2013) that some qualifications are more 'RPL-able' than others: for example, disciplinary knowledge in the Faculty of Applied Sciences is more hierarchically organised (and therefore less easily acquired through non-formal routes) than the more horizontally organised knowledge in the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences.

The ages of the RPL candidates admitted show that the majority fall within the range of 31-40 years, and that a few over 60 years of age have been admitted. Many individuals in their thirties who do not have formal qualifications find that this limits their career opportunities and therefore, many of the applications for RPL fall within this age group. At the same time, these people may find themselves

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<sup>43</sup> Not all applications approved by Senate result in the applicant registering for the programme, for varying reasons, which are explained further on.

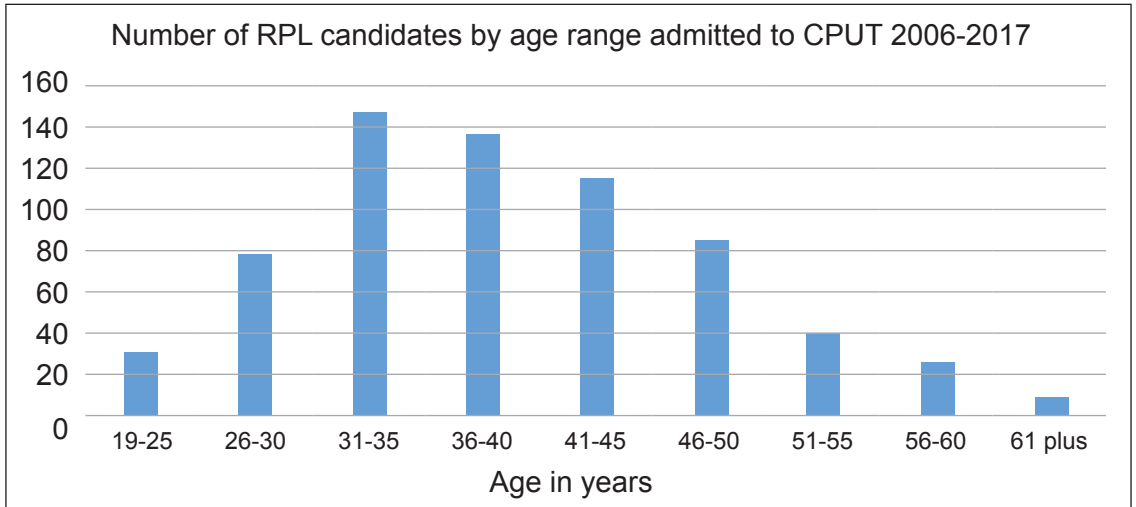
unable to study full-time due to a variety of responsibilities, yet most CPUT qualifications are offered only on a full-time basis. This can impact negatively on the uptake of RPL, especially for employed candidates.



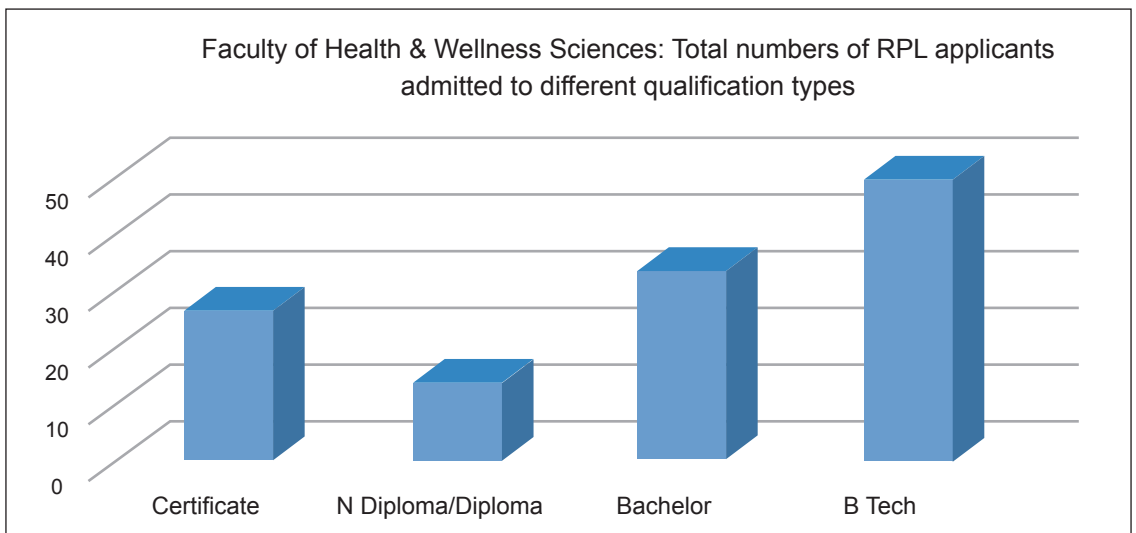
**Figure 3: Annual numbers of RPL admissions in all faculties at CPUT, 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)**

In the Faculties of Business and Management Sciences, Informatics and Design, and Engineering, the largest numbers of candidates were admitted to National Diploma programmes, followed by B Tech programmes (Figure 5).

In the Faculty of Health and Wellness, the majority of candidates were admitted to two different B Tech Nursing programmes. Eleven were accepted into the B Tech: Nursing (a four-year programme) as first years in 2017. The RPL process was used in the B Tech Primary Healthcare and Oncology as a special project with the South African Nursing Council (SANC). The successful RPL candidates from this project were granted 'Exemptions-RPL' for the subjects Primary Healthcare or Oncology.



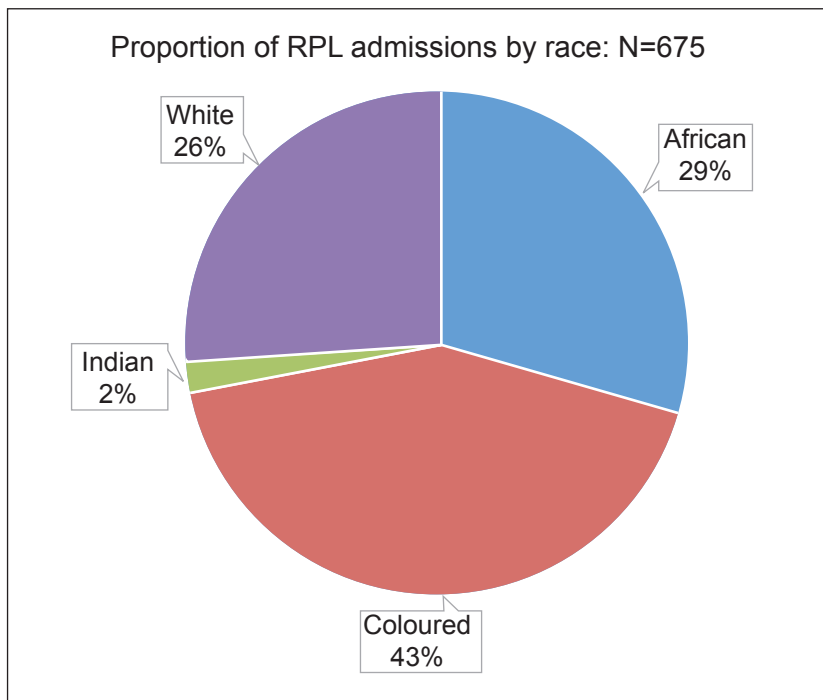
**Figure 4: Age distribution of RPL admissions at CPUT, 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)**



**Figure 5: Numbers of RPL applicants admitted to different qualification types in the Faculty of Health and Wellness at CPUT, 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)**

A large number of Paramedics have been RPL-ed into the Bachelor: Emergency Medical Care (EMC), as well as into the Diploma: EMC.

Overall, relatively small numbers of students, across all faculties, have been admitted to Master's level studies at CPUT. The demographics of all admissions via RPL indicate that more male than female students have been admitted (in a ratio of 365:312). Racial distribution is shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6: Demographics of RPL candidates: racial distribution, 2006-2017**  
(Source: CPUT data)

## ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF RPL STUDENTS

RPL is integral to lifelong learning, and the completion of studies of the RPL students is of great importance and interest to the University. Although the research team that compiled the report was faced with some technical challenges, it was determined that, of the 675 RPL candidates who were admitted to CPUT, 292 (43%) completed their studies and 58 (9%) continued with a subsequent qualification at the institution.

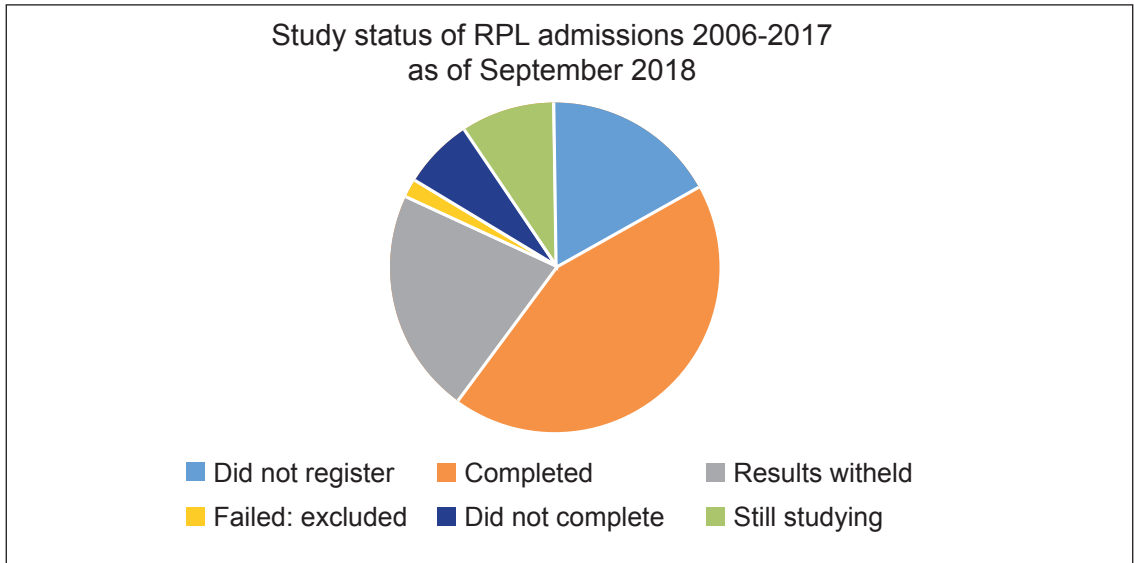
Unfortunately, of the 675, 113 (17%) did not register, and 150 (22%) have had their results withheld and so have not been able to graduate. Possible causes for non-registration could be the cost of studies, or the inability to study full-time, among other factors, whereas those who have had their results withheld probably still owe tuition fees. However, both of these findings need to be investigated further, and the causes addressed, if possible. This is especially important for those whose results have been withheld as, in nearly all cases, records indicate that the students have completed their studies and some have even progressed to, or completed, postgraduate qualifications. This is a tragic thing, because the person does not receive their results. This a great concern as it has a negative impact on the individual – on the person’s career, and their capacity in the economy. Table 1 and Figure 7 show these numbers.

**Table 1: Study status of ‘RPL students’ at CPUT, 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)**

<b>Study status of students who entered via RPL</b>	<b>Numbers of students in this category</b>
Did not register	113
Completed	292
Results withheld	150
Failed: excluded	13
Did not complete	46
Still studying	61
<b>Total</b>	<b>675</b>

Encouragingly, the data show that of the 562 who did register, 239 (42%) obtained a distinction in at least one subject, and of these, 58 (10%) went on to study further to Master’s and Doctoral Degree levels. The fact that a high percentage of the registered RPL students obtained a distinction in at least one subject indicates a possible positive link between their work-based knowledge, and the knowledge that is learned within the academy. Although further research needs to be done in this regard, it may be that RPL students, as mature learners,

are able to integrate their prior learning more easily with the knowledge they are exposed to in the classroom, which would be in line with similar findings by Eraut (2004).



**Figure 7: Study status of 'RPL students', 2006-2017 (Source: CPUT data)**

**Table 2: Learning trajectories of RPL admissions since 2006 (Source: CPUT data)**

Learning trajectory <sup>44</sup>	Distinctions
No further study after initial qualification	181
National Diploma → B Tech	36
B Tech → MTech	12
National Diploma → B Tech → MTech	3
National Diploma → B Tech → MSc	1
MTech → DTech/ DEd	3
Multiple additional qualifications/ short courses	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>239</b>

<sup>44</sup> BTech=Bachelor of Technology, MTech=Master of Technology, DTech=Doctor of Technology, MSc=Master of Science, DEd=Doctor of Education.

## **CONCLUSION**

The RPL process requires detailed planning, preparation, dedication and time, from everyone involved in the process. The process takes up to six months to complete and is time-consuming because the RPL applications are evaluated on an individual basis. RPL and the challenges it presents require of academic staff to evaluate not only the knowledge claims made by an RPL applicant but also their own. The interaction between academic knowledge and workplace knowledge is analysed from a different perspective, and an attempt made to address the knowledge gap between the different learning environments. The RPL process is a continual process of learning and refinement for all involved in it at CPUT.

Looking back on the past 12 years and knowing that 292 students have succeeded in graduating with a qualification which they would not have been able to obtain without the RPL process, makes all the effort and time dedicated to the process by both the institution and individual academics and administrators, worthwhile. Not only does the RPL decision affect the individual, but it also goes towards building the person's career. Furthermore, whether the application is successful or not, the process impacts on the family of the individual because, as candidates have reported, the RPL process of reflecting on and affirming their knowledge is life-changing. The rewards of RPL are entangled in the process for all the stakeholders.

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**INCLUSIVITY IN LEARNING, WORK,  
AND PROFESSIONALISATION  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**



# PAPER 3



# ‘RPL-ing’ Farm Workers and Bankers: Tailoring Method to Context

*Dr Karen Deller*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes two very different Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) interventions. One is completely practitioner-led; with candidates who were unable to read and write English, and unable to navigate the complexities of producing their evidence to match assessment requirements. This Agricultural sector project involved practical assessment in the field, which was videoed and recorded for assessment. Evidence gatherers translated concepts into indigenous languages for ease of understanding. The second RPL intervention was the complete opposite: candidate-led, online and self-service with access to an RPL Advisor on-demand and remotely through online discussion forums, email, calls and instant messaging. The online solution was implemented in the Banking sector, where there was a critical need to earn full qualifications quickly and efficiently. The two initiatives differed in terms of RPL candidate types, RPL methodologies, and levels of RPL candidate support. Yet both were successful, showing that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to RPL.

## INTRODUCTION

Chartall Business College is primarily a provider of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) services to corporate South Africa. The College has led and/or participated in over 70 RPL initiatives involving over 9 500 RPL candidates over the past 20 years<sup>45</sup>. These initiatives are funded either by the employers concerned, or by a Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA)<sup>46</sup>. Over the years, the

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<sup>45</sup> Chartall Business College, a well-established private RPL provider in South Africa, grew from the company Learnsys, founded by the author in 2000.

<sup>46</sup> There are currently 21 SETAs in South Africa, each focused on a particular sector of the economy.

methodology underpinning Chartall's RPL practices has evolved from a largely paper-based and practitioner-led process, to a more online and learner-centred model. This paper describes two very different RPL interventions – one from each side of the technological and responsibility-for-outcomes divide.

The Agricultural project focused on farm-hands and small-scale community farmers. People in both of these groups had limited levels of literacy, and wanted to earn full or partial qualifications so that they could raise the much-needed funding for their farming efforts. Much in the RPL process was foreign to them. Since they had limited levels of literacy, they needed the support of RPL practitioners at every step of the way.

In contrast, the Banking project focused on bank employees who needed a full qualification to remain employable in the Banking sector. These employees were computer-literate, time was critical, and they were spread out in every corner of the country – often one to a bank branch. The traditional 'come to a central point and meet an RPL practitioner' was not a viable option and there were over 5 500 people who needed to access the RPL intervention quickly. There were not enough RPL practitioners to assist with the number of RPL candidates in the prescribed timelines. Chartall then turned to technology to make this RPL initiative both less RPL practitioner-dependent, and more rapid.

## **RPL-ING SMALL-SCALE FARMERS AND FARM-HANDS**

There are 13 Agricultural Colleges in South Africa. These Colleges serve local communities and offer a wide range of full qualifications from those at NQF Level 1, through to NQF Level 7 Degrees and three-year Diplomas. Some of the qualifications are quality assured and awarded by AgriSETA<sup>47</sup>, while others fall under the Council on Higher Education (CHE)<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> The SETA for the Agricultural sector.

<sup>48</sup> There are three National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Sub-Frameworks in South Africa, for General and Further Education and Training, Occupational Qualifications, and Higher Education. The CHE oversees the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF).

In 2014, the AgriSETA Board embarked upon an RPL pilot that had as its ultimate goal, the development of RPL delivery capability in the Agricultural Colleges. The key objectives of the projects (the pilot and final project) were as follows:

- develop, implement and evaluate the AgriSETA RPL systems and policies;
- plan, execute and evaluate the delivery of RPL at no fewer than five Agricultural Colleges;
- design and develop RPL assessment tools, guides and related documents for at least eight full qualifications in the sector;
- train, coach and mentor RPL practitioners in each participating Agricultural College; and
- oversee the delivery of RPL at each participating College to ensure validity, fairness, reliability and practicability.

### ***Developing the RPL policies and tools needed***

The project started by reviewing and updating the existing AgriSETA RPL and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) policies (AgriSETA, 2017). Workshops were held with the appointed RPL champions at each of the nominated Colleges, and agreement was reached regarding expectations. At these meetings, the qualification that each College felt it wanted to RPL against was identified, and an analysis was conducted of the typical learner profiles. This work informed the design of the assessment tools.

The design of all assessment tools, and particularly RPL tools, needs to be done with a detailed understanding of:

- the typical learner's needs, agency and expectations;
- the qualification levels, learning assumed to be in place, NQF Level Descriptors and the mix of knowledge and practical outcomes in the qualifications; and
- the philosophy of RPL at the provider level (and at the SETA level in this case). For example, do these entities view the RPL process as a stand-

alone process or as part of the learning delivery? How much responsibility do the entities apportion to the candidates *versus* the RPL advisors? What level of support is available for candidates? And so on.

Due to the typical learner agency (under- or unemployed; unable to read, write or speak in English; with limited formal schooling) and the prevailing pedagogical paradigms<sup>49</sup> within the Agricultural Colleges, the RPL assessment tools were developed to accommodate the following:

- lack of assessors with SETA experience and even fewer moderators;
- lack of familiarity with portfolio-based assessment;
- a process that is highly RPL practitioner-driven, with little leadership expected from the candidate; and
- low levels of literacy (especially with respect to English reading and writing), numeracy and computer literacy.

A standard format for the assessment tools (portfolio) and related supporting documents (assessment guides, pre-assessments, preparation for assessment presentations, mediation processes, *etcetera*) was agreed upon. Eight RPL assessment tools were designed and developed by a team of subject matter experts led by a skilled instructional designer. These assessment tools were piloted with a group of learners with similar levels of agency, and refinements were made prior to the use of the tools.

### ***Training the RPL practitioners***

Trained and competent RPL advisors, assessors, moderators and administrators are the backbone of every successful RPL intervention. The initial plan was to train existing assessors and moderators at each College, to specialise in RPL.

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<sup>49</sup> In reality, the Agricultural Colleges do little instruction for SETA-accredited qualifications, preferring to deliver those accredited through the CHE. Even where the Colleges do offer SETA qualifications, the prevailing assessment method is an examination, not through a portfolio of evidence. There is a pass mark (50%) and registered assessors are not used. The exams are theoretical with little practical assessment.

However, the number of registered and trained assessors and moderators was very low. Furthermore, those who had achieved 'competent' status in either or both of the related unit standards had done so about five years previously. Very few had used this knowledge practically.

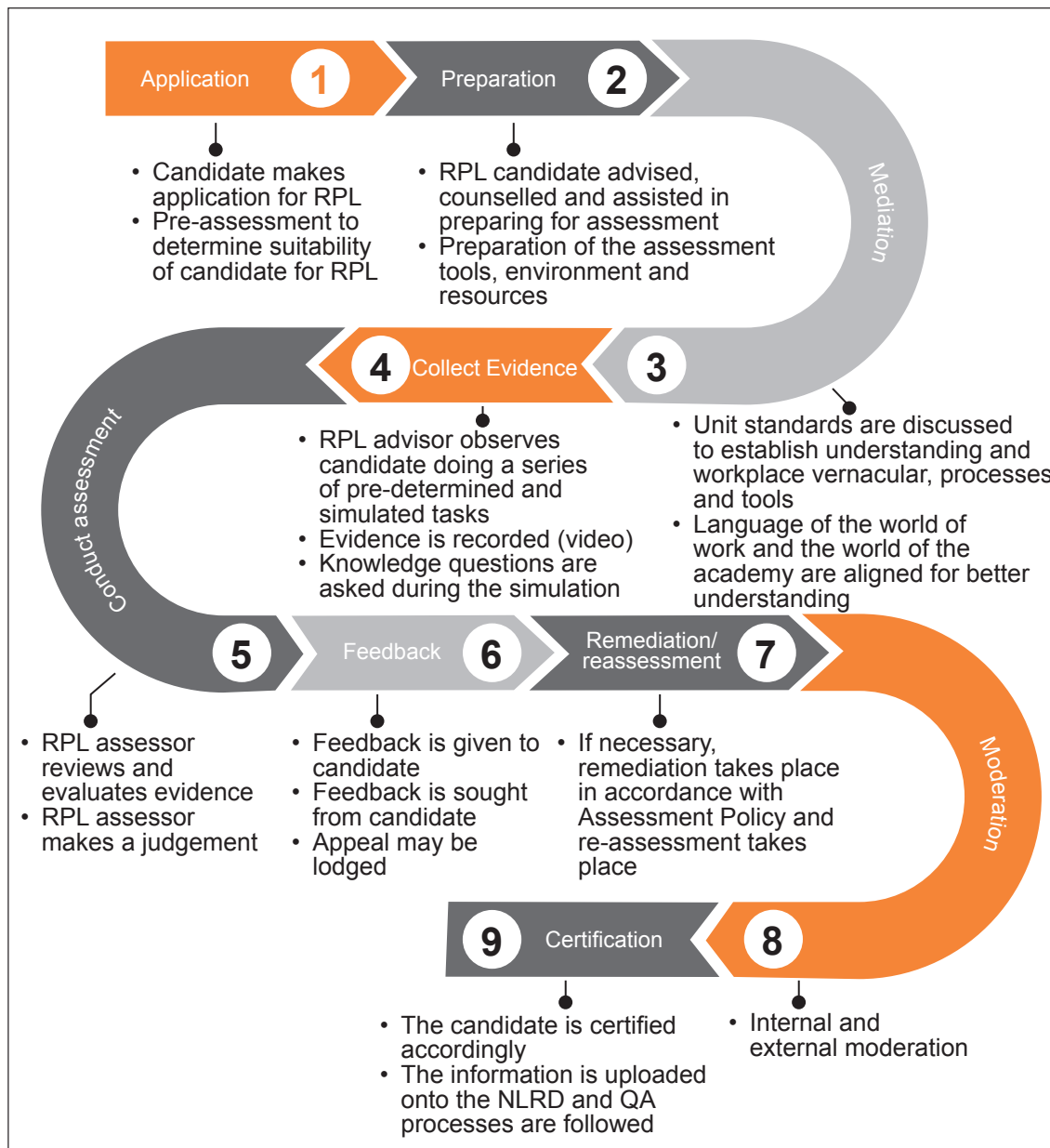
The decision was taken to:

- revise the assessor training where necessary, before training the personnel as RPL practitioners;
- train assessors and moderators as part of the project; and
- include the RPL practitioner training as embedded throughout the training.

Just over 100 RPL practitioners (assessors, moderators and RPL advisors) were trained as part of the project. On average, the classroom component of this training was five days. This part of the training was followed by practical coaching and mentoring during the actual RPL process, with an additional two weeks on-site at the training facility.

### ***Implementation of the RPL process***

Each Agricultural College was required to source RPL candidates. The candidates were either from the local farms, local cooperatives or the farm-hands who work at the College (assisting the students). Each of the six Colleges nominated between 20-30 RPL candidates, depending on the number of assessors they had. The process followed was as depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Step-by-step RPL process from the AgriSETA RPL policy (Source: Chartall Business College)**

Key:

NLRD=National Learners' Records Database

QA=Quality Assurance

RPL=Recognition of Prior Learning

Part of this project was to build the capacity to deliver RPL, so the newly trained RPL practitioners were mentored throughout the process. The RPL process typically followed the six steps outlined as follows.

### **Step 1: RPL application process**

The candidates either applied to the College to embark on an RPL process, or were nominated as part of the pilot. Each candidate was scheduled for an appointment with an RPL practitioner to undergo counselling. A pre-assessment was completed on a one-on-one basis, to determine the candidate's suitability for the qualification requested and her/his readiness for RPL. Part of the RPL pre-assessment form is generic; part is qualification- or skills programme-specific.

The candidates who were approved as RPL candidates were then scheduled to attend the RPL preparation process. The preparation process took place in small groups, with a single RPL advisor.

### **Step 2: RPL preparation process**

Candidates attended a preparation session prior to the RPL assessment, during which the RPL process was explained. The session ensured that the candidate was advised of her/his rights with respect to the RPL process and requirements. The RPL assessment plan was also agreed to at this session, and the formal documentation was distributed to the candidates. These documents included the Portfolio of Evidence requirements and format, all administration documents, the assessment contract, a National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) form<sup>50</sup> to complete, and others.

The trainee RPL practitioners delivered these sessions under the guidance of their trainer, and they were provided with feedback to assist with their ongoing development.

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<sup>50</sup> The NLRD is the relational database of the NQF that contains information on learning achievements, registered qualifications and part-qualifications, accredited providers, recognised professional bodies, and registrations against the listed professional designations in South Africa.

### **Step 3: RPL mediation process**

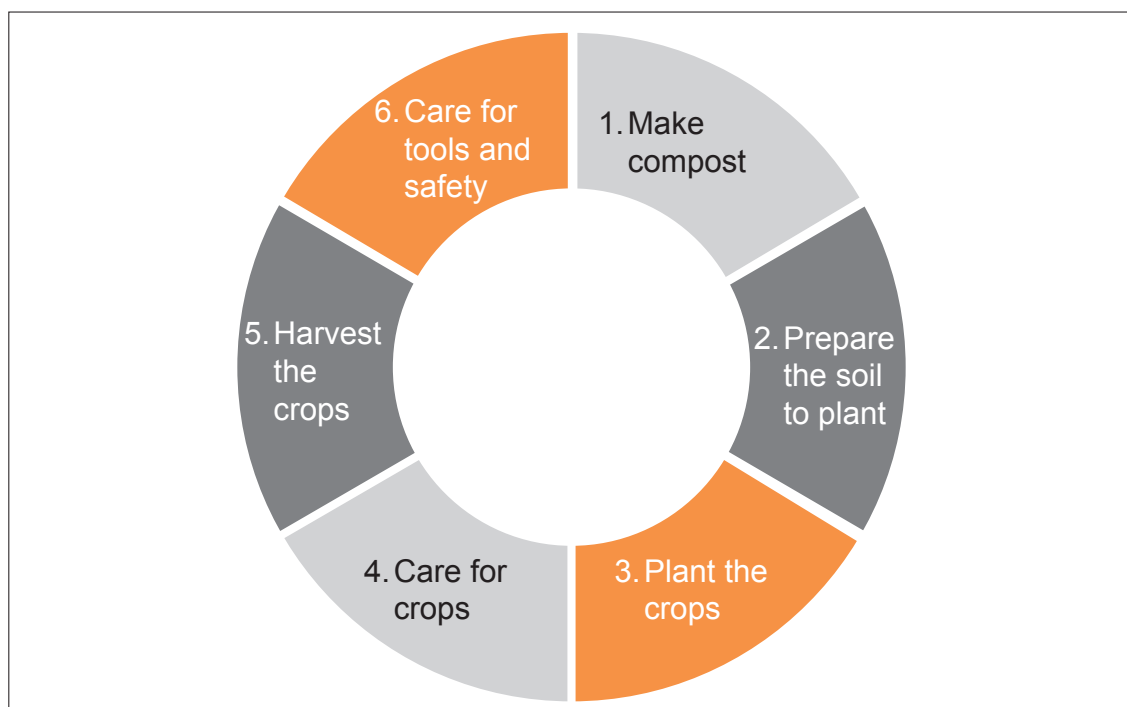
AgriSETA had identified the qualifications against which RPL would be done as part of the project; the qualifications ranged from being at NQF Levels 1 to 4. In the RPL assessment process for the qualifications at the lower NQF levels, Chartall found low levels of English comprehension and achievement against highly practical Unit Standard outcomes. The assessment tools used were largely practical observations conducted on the farm. The bulk of the candidates were assessed for NQF Level 1 qualifications in either Plant Production or Animal Production.

The RPL advisors were guided to mediate the existing workplace knowledge of their candidates. This mainly involved teaching them the technical (and in some cases Latin) terms for the tools, insects and parts of the plant/ animal that they knew by other, more common (and often not English) names. The candidates needed to be assured that they *did* have the knowledge needed, and that they just needed to have the academic/ technical words to describe what they knew. This mediation process was done over a few days before the actual RPL started, in small groups. The RPL advisor took the group through the unit standards and discussed what the candidates knew. The RPL advisors were all either experienced College staff or practising farm-workers themselves, so they were able to relate to the candidates and mediate between the world of work and the world of the 'academy' (as represented by the Unit Standard outcomes). By the end of the few days, both the candidates and the RPL advisors were comfortable with the process and what was expected of them.

### **Step 4: Collecting the evidence**



The evidence collecting stage was done in one of two ways. Where candidates were sufficiently literate, they were able to complete their Portfolio of Evidence on their own, while videoing or taking photographs of their work. Few in the NQF Level 1 cohort were able to do this. The typical process for collecting evidence was as follows.

1. The assessment tool's observation checklist was used to set up a simulation e.g. in the NQF Level 1 Plant Production qualification, the simulation followed the path depicted in Figure 2/ Table 1 below.
2. The RPL advisors were each accompanied by an assistant who videoed the candidate performing the tasks and answering the questions. The videoing was done using a Go-Pro camera or a cell phone. This division of labour left the RPL advisor free to run the observation, ask the questions, and support the candidate.
3. Once the evidence was collected, the footage was uploaded to Digital Versatile Disc (DVD). The candidate's name was placed on the DVD and it was saved with their administration documents and other supporting evidence such as performance appraisals, letters of testimony, *etcetera*.
4. A mentor for the RPL advisors was available throughout the observations.



**Figure 2: The step-by-step flow of the observation sheet for the General Education and Training Certificate (GETC): Plant Production (NQF 1) (Source: Chartall Business College)**

**Table 1: The first two tasks and knowledge questions from the observation sheet for the GETC: Plant Production (NQF 1) (Source: Chartall Business College)**

STEP 1:			
1.1 This activity requires that you show that you can make a compost heap in preparation for the planting of your crop.			
			Additional comments if required
<b>116206 SO2 (AC2)</b>	1.1.1 Make a compost heap: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mix manure or other nitrogen sources with organic matter ensuring the ratios are correct.</li> <li>Add the appropriate amounts of water to the composting mix.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Explain where you would get the organic waste from.</li> <li>2 Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it.</li> <li>3 Explain what the correct mix ratios should be.</li> <li>4 Explain what the correct water ratio is.</li> </ol>	
<b>116206 SO2 (AC1, AC3)</b>	1.1.2 Manage the composting process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Turn the compost pile.</li> <li>Add water when required.</li> <li>Maintain and store the compost correctly so that nutrients are not lost.</li> <li>Spread the compost when it is ready to use.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it (when to turn it, how often to turn it, when to add water and how much to add?)</li> <li>2 How do you store the compost?</li> <li>3 How do you know when the compost is ready to use?</li> <li>4 How much water should be added?</li> <li>5 Explain the consequences of leaving the compost heap unused for too long.</li> </ol>	

Key:

SO=Specific Outcome

AC=Assessment Criterion

### Step 5: Assessment of the collected evidence

For the assessment of the collected evidence, the RPL assessors convened in a room with computers. They viewed the recordings and made assessment judgements per Specific Outcome. If there were gaps, they highlighted this in a feedback report so that remedial evidence could be collected. This process was concurrently moderated by the onsite mentor so that the assessors could learn practically and immediately, where they had missed evidence or made incorrect decisions.

## **Step 6: Feedback to the RPL candidates**

Feedback was provided orally and in writing (to follow policy more than for practicality, as most candidates could not read their reports) and, where necessary, new videos of supplementary (remedial) evidence were recorded. The remedial evidence was then re-assessed, and final reports were drawn up. Moderation was conducted. The results were uploaded to the AgriSETA platform. AgriSETA conducted external moderation, and awarded full or partial qualifications based on the results.

## ***Agricultural sector project highlights***

Just over 100 RPL practitioners (advisors, assessors and moderators) were trained as part of the Agricultural College/ AgriSETA project. Furthermore, 120 farm-hands, community farmers and farm workers were engaged with the RPL process. With regard to the latter, most earned a part-qualification, and many are still engaged in the process. Those who completed either a full or part-qualification reported a great sense of personal satisfaction and pride in their achievements.

One farm-hand who works every day supporting the students who attend the Agricultural College stated that he wanted to wear his new qualification around his neck. He wanted the students to see that he was more than 'just an unqualified farm-hand'. He went on to say that the students would see that he had a qualification, and would respect him more.

A cooperative farmer reported that they would now get funding. This qualification meant they could 'go to the meetings with the funders and hold their heads up high' as they were now 'graduates'. The funders no longer had to rely on their word only, that they knew what to do; the cooperative farmers were now able to prove that they were a viable choice for funding.

Most of the six Colleges that participated in the project have launched in-house RPL centres; these prestigious launches featured stakeholders and local dignitaries. The RPL centres are beginning to put into practice the RPL skills

and processes that the College staff learned, to the benefit of their stakeholders and local communities. The RPL centres are supported in the short term, by the AgriSETA.

The Colleges are training additional RPL practitioners, especially assessors and evidence facilitators. This training is to accommodate the demand that is anticipated, once the RPL advocacy work reaches the communities.

## **RPL-ING BANKERS**

The size of the Banking sector in South Africa is considerable. There are 17 registered banks, three mutual banks, 15 local branches of foreign banks, and 39 foreign banks with approved local representative offices, making the sector a significant employer (Banking Sector Education and Training Authority [BankSETA], 2018). There are around 6700 bank branches (*Ibid.*) and another 800 non-formal transaction structures like Pick 'n Pay<sup>51</sup> (Tarrant, 2019). There were also a reported 189 954 bank employees in 2016 (BankSETA, 2018).

The Financial Service Conduct Authority (FSCA) and its forerunner, the Financial Services Board (FSB), set educational requirements for all people who provide financial advice to the public (Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services [FAIS] Act No. 37 of 2002). This Act requires all the bank employees who provide financial advice, to earn a full, recognised qualification if they want to remain employed in the sector.

Many people have complied with this Act in the years since its promulgation, but many are still in the process of completing recognised qualifications. The deadlines are determined by employees' dates of appointment to regulated job roles.

BankSETA oversees training in the Banking sector, and was approached by employers in the sector to look at creative ways of assisting those affected, to

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<sup>51</sup> Pick 'n Pay is an example of a large supermarket chain in South Africa.

achieve the required qualifications. Specifically, employers wanted cost efficiency (in terms of both time out of the workplace, and actual costs), scalability, flexibility in delivery (without reliance on 8h00-17h00 classroom sessions), and ease of managing small numbers without an increase in costs.

After extensive consultation (and a long tender process), Chartall Business College was appointed to design and develop an online portal that would administer both CAT and RPL. The ultimate mission of this portal is to facilitate access, success and progression through both RPL and CAT. The clear goals for the portal were, and remain:

1. to develop an online portal for the Banking sector that would be a mechanism for the promotion, pre-assessment, preparation, support, mediation and facilitation of both RPL and CAT in the sector;
2. to stimulate lifelong learning in the sector by promoting the recognition of past knowledge and work experience, to encourage people to see value in all learning;
3. to become a 'clearing house' for RPL between the candidates who need it, and the providers who offer it; and
4. to build capacity, knowledge and trust in both RPL and CAT, and offer an online repository of RPL and CAT information to anyone who logs onto the portal.

### ***Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) in the Banking initiative***

The banks in South Africa all have training centres and facilities that rival those in many of the residential universities. The training is, to all intents and purposes, 'formal' in that it "occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment ... that is explicitly designated as such" (South African Qualifications Authority [SAQA], 2018:5). Yet, this training is not considered 'formal' by many, because there is no uploading of the final results to the NLRD after moderation.

This internal training is delivered by a subject matter expert using up-to-date and well-packaged training materials, and is assessed robustly. The banks are also accredited providers and much of the material delivered is aligned to registered Unit Standards<sup>52</sup>. The assessment results are never recorded formally, due mostly to a lack of assessing capacity, and the added cost of moderation and related administration.

The internal training that met set requirements has been considered by banks to be robust enough to be used to award exemptions against Unit Standards<sup>53</sup>. Policy for CAT was developed for the Banking sector (BankSETA, 2015). This policy sets out key rules for CAT, and the process of mapping internal bank courses to registered Unit Standards, started. This process was very time-consuming. In all, 15 employers submitted over 4500 internal courses to be aligned to over 500 registered Unit Standards stored on the portal. The content of each internal course was mapped to either individual assessment criteria, specific outcomes, or to full Unit Standards. This mapping meant that one internal course could be used for exemption for:

- a whole Unit Standard;
- one or more specific outcomes (from one or more Unit Standards); and/or
- one or more assessment criteria (again, from one or more Unit Standards).

By collating the exemption outcomes for more than one internal course (and most candidates had completed over 100 internal courses), candidates were awarded exemption for entire Unit Standards. This complex mapping took a long time to programme and complete, but it made the process of granting exemption quick and seamless for the candidates when they needed to use it. An example of the mapping is shown in Figure 3. Figure 3 is a representation of a screenshot showing a whole Unit Standard, individual specific outcomes, and individual assessment criteria that an employee's internal course in Business Writing is

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<sup>52</sup> Unit standards registered on the NQF.

<sup>53</sup> The requirements were that training was structured, curriculated, trained, delivered and assessed by an accredited provider.

mapped to. The specific outcomes and assessment criteria can be drawn from multiple Unit Standards and from multiple qualifications.

ENABLING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE BANKING AND MICROFINANCE SECTOR

**Course: Business Writing** (Wesbank) [Edit](#) [Delete](#)

Course Name: Business Writing

Alternative names: Writing Skills Business Communication

Description:  
The purpose of Business communication is to convey in the best possible manner the core reason behind initiatives such as retaining clients, maintaining cordial relationship with business partners and serve to expand business. It acts as the catalyst for growth in any organisation. The purpose of this workshop is to equip learners with the skills needed to extract relevant information from text used in a business environment and identify features that are specific to these texts. Furthermore, learners will be able to follow a process in writing texts and reports for their business areas and improve their written communication in the corporate world.

Bank: [Wesbank](#)

Valid From: 2012

Valid to: 2017

Course Definition Summary: [Edit Definition](#) [Add to Definition](#)

**Unit Standards**

(1) 8976 Write for a wide range of contexts  
This unit standard will be useful to learners who communicate confidently and fluently in writing in almost any formal and informal situation. Competence at this level will help people to analyse and make mature judgements about complex, human, personal, social and environmental issues. [Remove](#)

**Specific Outcomes**

(1) SPECIFIC OUTCOME 3  
Respond to selected texts in a manner appropriate to the context. [Remove](#)

**Assessment Criteria**

(1) ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2  
Text-type, format and register used are on the correct level formality. [Remove](#)

(2) ASSESSMENT CRITERION 2  
The text-type, style, and register selected are appropriate to audience, purpose and context. [Remove](#)

**Figure 3: List of CAT exemptions for a single internal employer course (Source: BankSETA, 2019a)**

CAT matrices have also been developed for some Degree/Diploma subjects from various institutions. The intention was to make as much prior learning 'count' for credentials as possible, so that candidates were encouraged and motivated about what they had already learned/ achieved.

At present, anyone can log in to the portal, create a user-name and password, access the CAT matrix landing page, tick off internal courses (see Figure 4) that they have completed (with up to three employers and/or providers), and get a report showing how many exemptions they could earn against the nine full qualifications loaded onto the portal. If employees wish to proceed with the RPL step, they are then prompted to upload proof of their internal and other courses to the portal so that these courses can be verified manually by an RPL advisor before the candidate moves on to the RPL stage.

**Step 4:** Tick the course(s) you have completed and click "Add to my list":

**Note:** If the training provider, your employer or course is not listed here please send us the details by [opening a support case](#) and one of our staff will look into it.

Select	Course Name	Alternative Course Names
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Awareness Training for AML and CFT	Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing red flags Awareness Training for anti money laundering (AML) and the combating of the financing of terrorists (CFT)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Awareness Training for Sanctions Compliance	Sanctions Compliance, SCT
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Code of Banking Practice	COBP
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Consumer Protection Act	CPA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Corruption Risk Awareness	CRA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Enterprise, Governance & Compliance	EGC
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - FICA Process Training	FICA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act	FATCA
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Intemediary Code of Behaviour	COB COB_course
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - POPI Act	Protection of Personal Information Act Awareness Training Course
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Retail Data Governance	RDG, Retail Data Governance, Data governance
<input type="checkbox"/>	Nedbank Limited - Sanctions Compliance	SC

**Figure 4: Self-selection of internal courses to calculate exemptions (Source: BankSETA, 2019b)**

Figure 5 is a representation of a screenshot of what candidates would see in terms of the exemptions they could be granted through CAT for all nine qualifications on the portal.

<b>Your Credit Accumulation Analysis</b>				
<b>Candidate name:</b> <i>John Sample</i>	<b>ID:</b> 6807XX XXXX XXX			
<b>Your courses considered for CAT:</b>				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Passed National Senior Certificate with 2 South African Languages and Maths or Maths Literacy</i></li> <li>2. <i>Capitec Bank - SITE + Firm Foundations + Apprenticeship</i></li> <li>3. <i>Nedbank AMF</i></li> </ol>				
<b>Your Credit Accumulation Analysis for the qualifications you have accumulated credits for through CAT:</b>				
<b>20185 Further Education and Training Certificate: Banking (NQF Level 4)</b>				
	<b>Core</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Elective</b>	<b>Total</b>
Required for 20185 Further Education and Training Certificate: Banking (NQF 4):	0	56	64	Required for 20185 Further Education and Training Certificate: Banking (NQF 4):

Credits <u>obtained</u> through CAT:	0	56 NSC exemptions apply NSC with 2 Languages (40) NSC with Maths (16)	45 US 7231 (3) US 7236 (2) US 7237 (10) US 7244 (10) US 7255 (10) US 114744 (2) US 114759 (8)	101
Credits <u>still to be obtained</u> through RPL:	0	16	48	
<p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This qualification requires 0 core credits, 56 fundamental credits and 64 elective credits (Total = 120), but 30 core + elective credits must be obtained through RPL.</li> <li>• Based on the information you have provided (which must still be verified), you have obtained 0 core credits, 56 fundamental credits and 45 elective credits.</li> <li>• So, you will need to obtain RPL for 30 elective credits if you want to achieve this qualification.</li> </ul>				
<b>61589 National Certificate: Banking (NQF Level 5)</b>				
	<b>Core</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Elective</b>	<b>Total</b>
Required for 61589 National Certificate: Banking (NQF 5)	0	35	85	120 (A minimum of 30 core + elective credits must be obtained through RPL)
Credits <u>obtained</u> through CAT:	0	0	18 US 7334 (8) US 10045 (10)	18
Credits <u>still to be obtained</u> through RPL:	0	16	48	18
<p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This qualification requires 0 core credits, 35 fundamental credits and 85 elective credits (Total = 120), but 30 core + elective credits must be obtained through RPL.</li> <li>• Based on the information you have provided (which must still be verified), you have obtained 0 core credits, 0 fundamental credits and 18 elective credits.</li> <li>• So you will need to obtain RPL for 35 fundamental credits and 67 elective credits if you want to achieve this qualification.</li> </ul>				

**Figure 5: Candidates' view of the exemptions which could be granted through CAT, for all of the nine qualifications on the portal (Source: BankSETA, 2019c)**

## ***Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the Banking initiative***

Once the CAT exemptions have been calculated and verified, and the candidate has selected the qualification that they want to be RPL'ed against, the next stage of the process commences. To facilitate this process, the BankSETA RPL policy was updated (BankSETA, 2015b).

### **Pre-RPL process**

The RPL process in the Banking sector starts with an RPL readiness assessment to ascertain whether or not the candidate is suitable for RPL. This process comprises a series of questions based on the Unit Standards that they still need to complete to achieve the qualification. This exercise is a yes/no self-selection approach, and candidates are encouraged to be honest. Figure 6 below shows a representation of a screenshot with the RPL pre-assessment questionnaire.

The candidates' answers are collated, and they are given a final letter which outlines:

- the qualification they have selected;
- the Unit Standards they are exempt from, through the CAT process;
- the Unit Standards they have indicated they can RPL for (from the pre-assessment); and
- the Unit Standards that they should complete through formal training with an accredited provider (because they have said 'no' to a pre-assessment question).

### **RPL preparation process**

The candidate then starts the RPL preparation process. This process is done through a series of videos on the portal designed to tell the candidate about:

- how the RPL process will work;
- SAQA, unit standards, and other related information;
- the assessment principles; the assessment process; and
- their rights and responsibilities as an RPL candidate.

<b>RPL Pre-Assessment Questionnaire</b>		
<b>Please answer the questions below as accurately as possible.</b>		
The results of this questionnaire help us to identify which aspects of the qualification can be completed through RPL and which ones can be completed through training.		
1. Do you know how to process and respond to customer requests in a banking environment?  <i>US:7219 Elective (No NSC Exemption) Question Priority: High</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2. Do you know how to provide banking-related information services to customers?  <i>US:7223 Elective (No NSC Exemption) Question Priority: High</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3. Do you know how to establish and develop banking sales client relationships?  <i>US:7254 Elective (No NSC Exemption) Question Priority: High</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4. Do you comply with all banking sector legal requirements and understand the implications if you do not?  <i>US:10017 Elective (No NSC Exemption) Question Priority: High</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5. Do you comply with organisational ethics and are you able to explain this is necessary?  <i>US:10022 Elective (No NSC Exemption) Question Priority: High</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
		<b>SUBMIT</b>
		<b>CANCEL</b>

**Figure 6: RPL pre-assessment questionnaire (Source: BankSETA, 2019d)**

Once the candidates have completed the pre-RPL process, they are asked to select a provider through which the RPL process can be completed. At time of writing, there were three providers on the portal, each approaching RPL slightly differently: online *versus* face-to-face, and so on. Each of the providers has placed a short video on the portal, telling the candidates what they offer. Once

the candidate has selected a provider, the provider is sent an email telling them that someone has selected them, and directing them to start the RPL process with the candidate. Chartall Business College is one of the three RPL providers on the portal and its approach is a technology-enhanced RPL intervention through its own Learning Management System (LMS).

### **RPL process**

Once a note is received from the portal, the Chartall Business College RPL advisor sets the candidate up on the Chartall LMS. Chartall migrates copies of the candidate's documents from the BankSETA portal to the LMS (e.g. their identity documents, exemption letter NLRD information, *etcetera*). The LMS sends them a welcome letter, and guidelines for the next stage of their RPL journey. Candidates are allocated to an RPL advisor, who monitors their progress. Candidates' calendars are set up to reflect the Unit Standards they need to do via both RPL and training, and they are given the required RPL assessments and access to the online learning.

Where candidates are clearly not ideal for an RPL process (based on their RPL pre-assessments), people are provided with one-on-one support, coaching and any mediation required during this process. This support is personalised and targeted at specific candidate needs.

Most people who start the RPL process online through the portal, have a basic level of computer literacy. By the time they have completed the process, they have a high level of digital and online literacy, and are able to navigate, search for information, and sift through various sources. They are able to assess the value and validity of these sources. As part of the RPL process, candidates are required to build an e-portfolio of evidence for assessment, to which they have ongoing access. Many return to the LMS and use their e-portfolios for other qualifications, for job interviews, and as a storage space for personal documents. It is clear that this process has increased the level of online and digital literacy – and the latter is a valuable 21<sup>st</sup> century life skill that candidates would not have developed easily had they not used an online delivery mode of RPL. Many

cited the development of their digital literacy as a significant benefit of the online methodology.

At the time of writing, over 4000 Banking sector employees had earned a full qualification through the online combination of CAT, RPL and online learning – all funded through vouchers made available through a BankSETA funding window.

### ***Post-RPL process***

The value of the BankSETA portal endures beyond RPL implementation. Each candidate has a personal development plan. These plans are unique because they consider the Unit Standards that each person needs to do, to complete the full qualification once the CAT and RPL processes have been completed. Specific content is curated and made available online to address candidates' learning gaps. In addition, candidates are awarded a series of badges during the RPL and online learning processes, which can be used to attest to their attainment of non-credentialled outcomes, such as the critical cross-field outcomes and other relevant 21<sup>st</sup> century skills<sup>54</sup>. This recognition for non-credentialled skills bridges the gap between the (mostly) outdated 'legacy'<sup>55</sup> Unit Standards and the skills needs for the modern workplace.

Candidates are also able to access advice and support from their RPL advisors on either the portal or the Chartall LMS, as they retain access to both. Many use this to bounce ideas off a person who is outside their workplace, to gain information on possible new learning/RPL paths or even to discuss issues relating to job search and Curriculum Vitae building. There are plans in place to extend this even further to include career assessment and other related services.

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<sup>54</sup> Examples of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for which badges are given, are: digital literacy, cultural literacy, analytical skills, teamwork, creative thinking, emotional intelligence, and others.

<sup>55</sup> The term 'legacy' in the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) context in South Africa, denotes the Unit Standards and qualifications developed under the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 and quality assured by SETAs. Currently in the OQSF context, occupational qualifications are developed and quality assured by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), which delegates some of its functions to SETAs. The legacy qualifications are in the process of being replaced with the QCTO's occupational qualifications.

## ***Highlights of the 'RPL & CAT Portal'***

Over the five years that the 'RPL & CAT Portal' has been live, the following have been achieved.

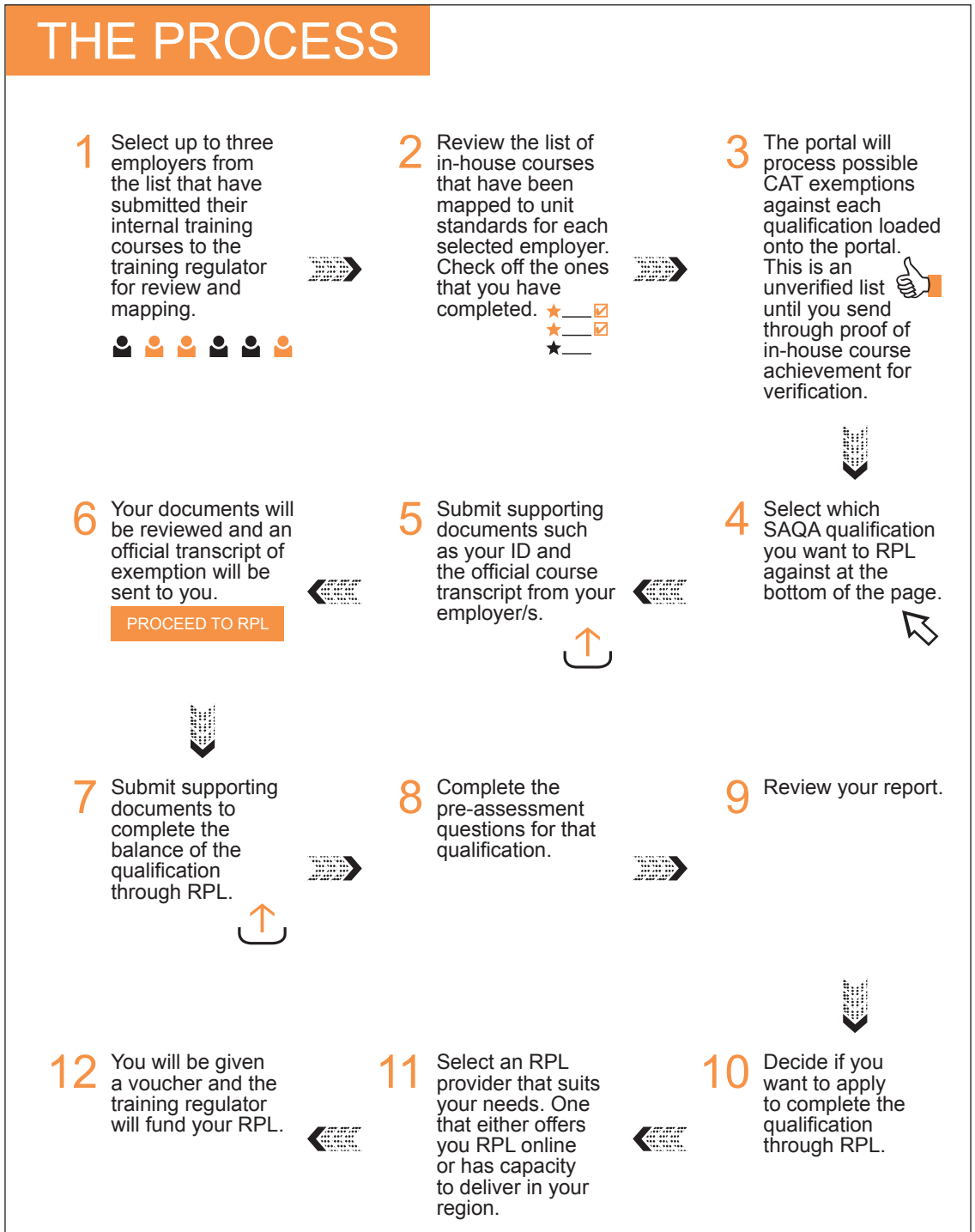
- 4 000 people have graduated with a full qualification using a combination of RPL, CAT and (if required), additional learning. This enabled them to remain employable in the Banking sector.
- 9 000 people have accessed some of the services on the portal. Many have completed the CAT process without moving into the RPL step. Some have used the information services, and many have completed the RPL pre-assessment and then elected rather to complete the balance of their qualifications through training as opposed to RPL.
- 4 500 stand-alone courses have been mapped to approximately 500 Unit Standards on the portal (and to their related specific outcomes and assessment criteria).

The full process for candidates accessing the portal, represented as a flow diagram in Figure 7.

Key to note is that the portal is personalised, enabled for self-service (with available support), and allows the candidates to access the services in their own time, at their own pace, and in their own spaces. This combination makes the portal a viable model for the massification of RPL, at least amongst those with access to WIFI, data and a smart phone or computer (learning on the portal can be accessed on a smart phone, but it is difficult to complete assessments on a small screen).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The discussion of Chartall's two RPL initiatives in this paper illustrates that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model for RPL across contexts, qualifications, sectors and learners.



**Figure 7: Flow diagram showing the steps followed by a typical candidate when using the RPL & CAT Portal (Source: Chartall Business College)**

It takes the skill of the RPL project leader to identify the unique circumstances of each context, and refine the approach accordingly. Key factors to consider include the following.

- The **ultimate end goal** for the RPL (for example, is it: credit for a full qualification or part-qualification; a diagnostic assessment; for access or advanced standing?). Both of the cases described in the paper involve RPL for credit, but many other purposes for RPL do exist.
- **What do the RPL candidates bring** to the RPL situation? Their agency is critical when designing the approach to follow. Key considerations include:
  - **level of language literacy:** the ability to read and write in English (the language of the assessment tools);
  - **power relationships in the workplace** (this was not discussed in the paper but was evident in the AgriSETA case because there were farm-hands in the same RPL cohorts as community farm leaders. In some cases, the assessor was the farm workers' direct supervisor. This had the potential to impact on participation if the junior staffer felt intimidated and/or afraid to fail in the presence of a senior. In one case, the supervisor fared less well in the RPL assessment than the junior staffer, and this had an impact on the supervisor's participation (he withdrew);
  - **level of formal education and candidates' experiences** within the formal education sector (where this is negative or experienced as non-supportive, the RPL process needs to be more supportive);
  - **level of computer literacy and numeracy;**
  - **access to the tools** (AgriSETA case) **or documents** (BankSETA case) needed, to demonstrate practical competence;
  - **need for the qualification:** the Banking sector employees needed the qualification to remain employable; the farm workers wanted the qualification for funding. It appeared that a skills programme was also sufficient for the farm workers, and they appeared not to be as driven;

- **candidates' time** to devote to their RPL; and
- **other personal factors** such as home language *versus* the language of assessment. In the AgriSETA project, all assessments were done in a combination of English, Afrikaans and African languages – the latter being the language used on the farms. Gender; age, and other such factors also played a role.
- The **skill of the RPL advisors**, who are the most important part of the RPL process because they guide, coach, mentor, and mediate between the world of work and the work of the academy. RPL advisors had to know, for example, what the farm hands colloquially called the mouth of the locust so that they could teach them the Latin terms 'mandible' and 'maxilla', as well as the correct home language words. In Banking, the RPL advisors had to know the banking processes, systems, keystrokes and documents for all the bank's procedures.
- **RPL advisors' in-depth knowledge** of both workplace and academia are key for the mediation without which the RPL process would be jeopardised. As the RPL advisors are relatively new and unskilled, detailed policy, criteria and guidelines are needed to provide guidance so that all candidates are treated fairly and equitably;
- The **rules of the SETAs** are key. Some SETAs understand RPL to a greater extent than others. Some SETAs require candidates to answer questions for every single assessment criterion; this makes the RPL process cumbersome and lengthy. Other SETAs (such as BankSETA and AgriSETA) have more enabling policies and procedures. The views of SETAs on RPL affect the duration, cost and time taken to conduct an RPL assessment.

The lessons learned, and contributions made, by both of the case studies of RPL practice at Chartall Business College and the sectors in which they took place, have been significant. The 'RPL & CAT Portal' has applicability beyond its current application, and this is being explored with other SETAs and professional bodies.

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# PAPER 4



# **A Case Study of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in a Food and Beverage Manufacturing Environment**

*Ms Colette Tennison*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents a case study of a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) initiative in the Food and Beverage Manufacturing sector. The initiative was developed and implemented by Competence Performance Consulting (Pty) Ltd., a private training provider accredited by the Food and Beverage Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (FoodBev SETA). The initiative provided employees working for a beverage packaging company, the opportunity to achieve an NQF Level 3 National Certificate in Food and Beverage Packaging Operations. This paper describes the RPL model that was applied in the roll-out of the programme, as well discussing some of the challenges faced during the implementation process. It also addresses some of the positive outcomes of the programme, and suggests a way forward for future roll-outs using this model.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2015, the Food and Beverage Sector Education and Training Authority (FoodBev SETA), which oversees qualifications in the Food and Beverages Manufacturing sector, had as part of its vision the aim of contributing to the 'redress of past inequalities in education and training' (FoodBev SETA, 2015). The idea of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a tool for transformation and redress (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2016) is one that has been discussed at length. Within the Food and Beverages Manufacturing sector, the uptake on RPL had however been limited, with several attempts at implementation ending unsuccessfully. The reasons for this are varied, but include the struggle for skills development providers to develop models and related tools that would overcome the barriers experienced by those attempting to gain qualifications in this sector, via the RPL route.

In an attempt to address these challenges, a skills development provider operating in the sector designed a model that focused on meeting the needs and requirements for RPL against a packaging qualification registered at NQF Level 3 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and quality assured by the FoodBev SETA. This paper draws on my experiences as a consultant who worked with the provider in the development and implementation of the programme, but who is also a researcher, studying the outcomes of the programme. The paper describes the RPL model applied in the roll-out of the programme, as well as discussing some of the challenges faced during the implementation process. It also addresses some of the positive outcomes of the programme, and suggests a way forward for future roll-outs using this model.

## **BACKGROUND**

Many employees in the Food and Beverages Manufacturing sector have few or no qualifications, and are unable to progress within their companies or industries as a result (Khoza, 2015). The opportunity to provide these employees with a route to access a qualification is a significant one, which has been indicated by several companies to be one of which they would like to take advantage.

Providing employees with an opportunity to progress in their careers by giving them access to a qualification addresses to a small extent the continued need for redress of past inequalities. These are employees who by virtue of their lack of education are unable to gain access to formal academic learning programmes. However at the same time, they have many years of experience, and exhibit their workplace competence on a daily basis. By recognising their current skill levels and competence, and extending to them opportunities to gain the qualifications that they need to progress within their careers, these employees would be given the recognition they deserve, and this opens doors to further opportunities.

In 2015, Competence Performance Consulting (Pty) Ltd. (CPC) identified the need for an RPL programme to be rolled out in the Food and Beverage Manufacturing sector, and began consultations with both the FoodBev SETA,

and an employer in the sector. As a FoodBev SETA-accredited Skills Development Provider, CPC had already successfully rolled out several learnerships<sup>56</sup> in the sector and was familiar with the industry. This enabled CPC to tailor the RPL programme to the needs of the employer, as well as to the requirements of the SETA. Drawing on this experience, a model was developed based on the NQF Level 3 registered qualification for Food and Beverage Packaging Operations<sup>57</sup>. This RPL programme was rolled out with an employer in the sector, as a pilot project that focused on Machine Operators working in a high-speed beverage packaging environment.

## **RPL MODEL**

### ***Overview of the RPL model***

The FoodBev sector RPL process was designed to run over a six-month period, which included the whole process from the identification of candidates through to certification. The model was designed to allow candidates to demonstrate their competence in operating the machines, as well as their grasp of the supporting knowledge bases. It specifically aimed to award the qualification to candidates who demonstrated the full range of knowledge, practical skills, and applied competence, and not to those who are colloquially referred to as ‘push button operators’ – employees who are able to operate the machines, but do not understand the concepts underpinning what they are doing. Within the specific environment in which the pilot was rolled out, all of the candidates had previously been through extensive non-formal internal company training.

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<sup>56</sup> The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) defines a learnership as “a work based learning programme that leads to an NQF registered qualification”, and which is “directly related to an occupation or field of work” (SAQA, n.d.[b]). To date, the SETAs have been responsible for the quality assurance and funding of these programmes under the NQF. Grant funding can be given for employed or unemployed learnerships, based on the learners’ socioeconomic status when they enter the programme. Unemployed learnerships are funded at a higher rate as the funding includes a monthly stipend allocation for learners; employed learnerships are given to companies for the training of current employees.

<sup>57</sup> NQF 3 National Certificate: Food and Beverage Packaging Operations (SAQA ID: 57694).

The aim of this RPL process was to award candidates a qualification that was quality assured by the FoodBev SETA, and the programme therefore had to comply with the quality assurance requirements of the SETA. In developing this model, the RPL policy of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO, 2016)<sup>58</sup> was consulted. The underlying principles for RPL as stated in the QCTO's (2016) policy were incorporated into the design of the model. Significant for this model was the need for an RPL process to "recognise the diversity of knowledge, skills and learning styles, and provide holistic and flexible assessment", and the principle that, "there is no RPL without learning" (*Ibid.*:9). Based on these principles, the model focused on enabling the candidates to make explicit, through language, the extensive knowledge and skills that they were already demonstrating, while acknowledging the need for further training in certain areas where gaps were identified in their knowledge bases.

Foundational to the design of the model was the specification in the qualification document that for RPL, the "qualification will be awarded should a learner demonstrate that all the Exit Level Outcomes (ELOs) of the qualification have been attained" (SAQA, n.d.[a]). Through the Exit Level Outcomes of the qualification and their associated assessment criteria, the assessment criteria of the individual Unit Standards that made up the qualification were addressed, but at a more holistic level. Focusing on the Exit Level Outcomes instead of the individual assessment criteria reduced the need for extensive alignment exercises that were merely focused on 'ticking the boxes'. Focusing on the Exit Level Outcomes also allowed for an integrated, holistic approach to evidence-gathering that demonstrated the candidates' ability to reflect critically on their evidence, while still ensuring that it aligned with the qualification requirements.

Despite the more holistic approach to the design of the RPL assessments, the provider strove to maintain the high standards required by the FoodBev SETA and ensure that all elements of the qualification were addressed. Specific attention

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<sup>58</sup> In South Africa, there are three NQF Sub-Frameworks, each overseen by a Quality Council. The QCTO oversees the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF).

was paid to ensuring that the fundamentals (Mathematics and Communication) of the qualification were included in the assessments. Within the Exit Level Outcomes of the qualification, certain associated assessment criteria directly corresponded to the fundamentals section of the Unit Standards, however they contextualised the Mathematics and Communication requirements to the packaging environment. Thus in the design of the model, candidates were encouraged to provide contextualised evidence of their competence in these areas.

### ***First stage of the RPL process***

The first stage of the RPL programme entailed the selection of the necessary candidates. This was done through a comprehensive application form, followed by screening assessments. These assessments covered literacy and numeracy, as well as further screening to address the content knowledge required in the packaging environment. Due to the way in which the RPL model was designed, and in order to meet the qualification requirements, candidates were required to meet minimum standards for literacy and numeracy. As the focus of the programme was only on closing the knowledge gaps, candidates were expected to achieve a minimum of 70% in the technical packaging knowledge screening part of the assessment.

### ***Second stage of the RPL process***

The second stage of the RPL programme – which constituted the largest section of the project in terms of time investment – involved contact time with the candidates, as well the collection of evidence by the candidates in the form of a journal of their workplace experiences. As candidates entering the programme were expected to have a significant level of subject matter understanding already, contact time was limited to 10 days, and focused on closing any identified knowledge gaps as well supporting candidates in the completion of their journals.

Journals of workplace experience were compiled by the candidates while they were operating the machines, and were composed of any naturally-occurring

workplace evidence that the candidate felt may address the Exit Level Outcomes of the qualification. The intention was that the journaling process would collect sufficient supporting evidence to demonstrate the candidates' competence and ability to perform the required tasks. The evidence collection took place over a period of approximately three months, with candidates spending six weeks on each of the two machines on which they were required to demonstrate competence. Unlike in the standard learnership, they did not spend time on the machines in order to learn how to operate them, but rather to allow them sufficient time to collect the required evidence.

### ***Final stage of the RPL process***

After successful completion of the journals for both of the machines required, candidates were prepared for, and completed, a final assessment in the form of workplace observations. During the observations, candidates were required to demonstrate their knowledge and skill in operating both machines. The workplace observation assessment instrument was specifically aligned to the Exit Level Outcomes and associated assessment criteria, of the qualification. The observations provided the final evidence of the candidates' abilities and, when combined with the journals, were intended to demonstrate sufficient evidence of competence in order for candidates to achieve the qualification.

### ***Quality assurance***

In line with the FoodBev SETA quality assurance processes, the RPL programme underwent rigorous external moderation and verification at the stipulated points, by a FoodBev SETA-appointed external moderator. The FoodBev SETA required external induction moderation before the roll-out of the RPL programme, interval moderation after 50% of the programme had been completed, and exit moderation once the programme had been completed<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>59</sup> Induction moderation considers up-front moderation, of aspects such as the instruments and processes to be used in a programme. Interval moderation focuses on programme developments and achievements to date. Exit moderation can consider all/any aspects of a programme.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RPL PROGRAMME**

### ***Initial steps***

Extensive marketing was done by the Skills Development Provider at the site identified by the employer, to encourage interest in the RPL programme. A series of 'expression of interest' workshops were conducted to create awareness, and address any concerns that potential candidates may have had. Within the production environment, consultations were also held with the operators' team leaders and managers, to request their support for the programme. Potential candidates were encouraged to complete the application forms and to submit these through their internal contact people.

The application form included questions around the candidates' current work, as well as providing an opportunity for them to record all relevant previous work experience and volunteer work, and all formal and non-formal training that they had received. Candidates were required to complete a motivation letter and to submit a letter of motivation from their team leaders or direct managers. The aim of including the motivation letters was to ensure that the candidates understood what they were applying for, and that they had management support during the programme as their team leaders were responsible for allocating them to the required machines.

### ***First candidates to follow the process***

#### **Implementation of Stage 1**

Ten potential candidates were given the opportunity to complete the screening process. Screening was conducted on-site while candidates were working on their shifts. Literacy and numeracy screening was done, using a screening tool that aligned each candidate's current English language and numeracy skills performance, to an NQF level. Their packaging-related knowledge was assessed using a test developed by a packaging subject matter expert. This test covered general packaging knowledge concepts, in line with the qualification

requirements and expected machine knowledge. Based on the results of the screening process, nine candidates were accepted into the RPL programme.

## **Implementation of Stage 2**

During the second stage of the RPL programme, candidates attended 10 contact days, which were split between days focused on the fundamentals component, and technical workshops focused on closing the candidates' knowledge gaps. The fundamentals workshops were aimed at assisting candidates in identifying where they already used Mathematics and Communication in their work, as well as providing guidance and inputs on how to compile their journals of workplace experience. The technical workshops brought in subject matter experts to both assist candidates in closing their knowledge gaps, and encourage candidates to extend their understandings of the packaging environment.

Candidates were coached on the evidence requirements for their journals and how to align their evidence to the exit level outcomes and associated assessment criteria of the qualification. They were required to produce 10 days' worth of evidence for each of the two machines that they operated – for this programme, the machines were a bottle filler, and a labeller.

The journal compilation process required extensive inputs for both the fundamentals, and from the technical facilitators – who assisted the candidates in accurately capturing the evidence of their competence. However, as candidates completed their journals based on their actual workplace practices, the evidence produced aligned well to the requirements. Candidates also had to reflect critically on their journals, and align their evidence to the exit level outcomes of the qualification, which they did successfully after receiving coaching from the facilitators. All nine candidates eventually completed their journals for both machines; the journals were then assessed by a FoodBev SETA-registered assessor.

## **Implementation of the final stage**

Once candidates had successfully completed their journals, they moved to Stage 3 of the model. Stage 3 involved the observation of candidates operating each machine for a period of several hours, as part of the daily production runs; the observations were designed to confirm the competence demonstrated/ reported in the journals. A FoodBev SETA-registered assessor, who was also a packaging subject matter expert, conducted the observations. The assessor was required to fit in with the company's shift allocations and production constraints. Once the candidates had completed the observations and met the assessment requirements, they were declared competent.

As this was a pilot programme, the FoodBev SETA took a particular interest in ensuring that the quality assurance processes were conducted correctly. RPL-specific versions of the external moderation toolkits were produced. The toolkits covered both the standard quality assurance points, as well as RPL-specific elements, to ensure that the programme met the required standards. During induction moderation at the beginning of the programme, the external moderator focused on ensuring that the model and assessment instruments sufficiently addressed all FoodBev SETA and qualification requirements. They also ensured that there was alignment between the assessments, the exit level outcomes and associated assessment criteria. Interval moderation occurred when the programme was approximately 50% complete and focused on the journals of workplace experience. Final exit moderation was conducted upon completion. The moderator examined all the evidence submitted by the candidates to ensure that it complied with good assessment principles and the qualification requirements. The programme was successfully exited within the planned six-month timeframe, and all nine candidates received their certificates in the middle of 2017. The FoodBev SETA endorsed the possibility of further roll-outs of the programme.

## **SOME CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED**

### ***Limited number of RPL applicants***

Only 10 potential candidates submitted applications and underwent the screening process for the Food and Beverage RPL initiative discussed in this paper. While there were various reasons for this, the main ones identified were the failure of a previous RPL attempt, which led to scepticism on the part of potential candidates, as well concerns about the screening process. As many potential candidates had been out of school for an extended time, there was resistance to the idea of writing what they considered to be an 'exam' for literacy and numeracy. Both of these concerns were addressed during the 'expressions of interest' workshops but unfortunately remained barriers for many potential candidates and led to a lower number of applications than anticipated.

The scepticism regarding RPL was directly linked to the previous RPL experiences of that company's employees. However, the concern around the literacy and numeracy screening assessments must be considered and addressed when rolling out the programme again, as it is anticipated that this matter is likely to be a common concern for future potential applicants.

### ***Screening process***

The rigour of the screening process was critical for the success of the RPL programme. Although the use of the literacy and numeracy screening assessments in the RPL process was heavily debated, it was apparent in the final outcome of the programme that the candidates' success resulted from ensuring that they were able to cope with the rigours of the programme. This was also true for the Packaging knowledge assessment. Candidates had already undergone previous internal company training, and were familiar with the machines and knowledge required. The high 'entry levels' of candidates starting the RPL programme, ensured that the evidence produced for assessment was also of a high standard.

The number of years of experience listed by each candidate also had an impact on the candidates' progress. Although all candidates were successful in the programme, those who entered the programme with the most experience tended to be more successful in completing their journals, and only required one attempt for their workplace observations.

### ***Production constraints***

As the RPL programme was designed for implementation in a manufacturing environment, the constraints of the production context needed to be considered as they impacted directly on the potential for candidates to succeed. Critical for the success of the programme was the commitment from management and the candidates' team leaders, to ensure that candidates were placed at the correct machines for sufficient time during the rollout of the programme. Without the necessary machine time, candidates would not be able to collect sufficient evidence for their journals, nor would they be able to gain further experience in the areas where there were gaps in their knowledge bases.

Production constraints also had a substantial impact on the timeframe of the programme. Overall, the programme ran within the required six months – even although it was on hold due to production constraints, for approximately two months in the middle of the rollout process, to accommodate the company's peak production time. In peak production times, machine operators are required to focus solely on production. Despite this break, candidates were encouraged to continue to gather journal evidence during this period as it provided opportunities that they would not necessarily have had on a regular basis, such as pack changes and other changeovers that are not done very frequently on all packaging lines.

### ***Documenting candidates' knowledge and skills***

As already noted, the journal compilation process was a challenge for many of the candidates. During the screening, the candidates had already demonstrated that they were at the required level for the programme, and were competent on

the machines due to the company's internal training. They struggled, however, to explain in writing and words what it was that they were doing, and why they were doing it. Some candidates also struggled to reflect critically on their experiences. These aspects required extensive support by the facilitators, to mediate the process and allow the candidates to develop their writing abilities. The mediation process was therefore focused on assisting the candidates with capturing the evidence in a way that could be aligned to the exit level outcomes, and ensuring that they understood the exit level outcome requirements. The candidates, however, remained responsible for the actual evidence collection and alignment process.

Overall, the knowledge and skills demonstrated by the candidates through their journals and the workplace observations, were of a high standard and more than sufficient to demonstrate competence against the exit level outcomes of the qualification. A comprehensive analysis of the knowledge and skills that surfaced in the programme is currently underway as part of a doctoral thesis by the author of this case study. Preliminary findings in this regard point to the broad spectrum of skills and underpinning knowledge bases demonstrated by candidates, most significantly in their journals and the workplace observations.

### ***Cost of the programme***

Although designed to be as cost-effective as possible, the Food and Beverage RPL programme could not be run within the current SETA grant expectations<sup>60</sup>. There is an expectation that the RPL process would be a more cost-effective process than that of the learnership. However, this view fails to consider the high labour costs, namely, of the facilitators and assessors. The programme relied heavily on high quality subject matter experts to mediate the process and this impacted substantially on its cost.

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<sup>60</sup> Grants for RPL vary depending on the SETA, but tend to be much lower than the grants for employed learnerships. Currently for FoodBev SETA, the grants for RPL are half that of the funding for a learnership, which in itself only contributes about 60% to the market-related learnership implementation cost (Turner, 2019).

In addition, the observation assessments need to be done when candidates are working on their shifts. This means that the assessors need to be on site for extended periods in order to accommodate all of the candidates, including those working on night shifts. The fact that the implementation schedule had to be changed repeatedly to accommodate production demands, led to further increases in costs. While the programme remained *relatively* cost effective, the costs of running such a programme cannot be underestimated.

## **RPL INITIATIVE OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS**

The employer's aim was to provide candidates with an opportunity to be awarded a recognised qualification on par with that awarded to learners completing learnerships with the company. This was important for the company as it recognised that the experienced employees were responsible for training the new learners. All nine candidates completed the programme successfully, and were certificated by the FoodBev SETA.

Although all of the candidates demonstrated a level of competence and knowledge before entering the RPL programme, feedback from candidates indicated that the programme had extended their knowledge and understanding of the packaging environment. This was one of the aims of the programme, which was supported by the inclusion of the technical workshops which used company subject matter experts. There was also feedback from management that as a result of the programme, candidates were able to reflect critically on their workplace practices and processes, as well as being multi-skilled and able to operate in a wider variety of contexts.

Both candidates and management commented on the impact that the programme had had on employee morale. For the candidates, it provided recognition and their certificates demonstrated that they were competent in their job. It was also their first step for possible career progression. After the RPL initiative, several candidates went on to study further, or to complete artisan training programmes. From a management perspective, there was an increase in

motivation on the part of the candidates, as well as a willingness to take on further responsibilities.

## **FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES**

### ***Working in different languages***

Since its first round, the Food and Beverage RPL programme was run again, with a smaller group, at a different company. Despite some significant challenges faced by candidates at the second company, the programme was again successful – the candidates completed the programme successfully. One additional challenge experienced, was that the programme had to be completed in *Afrikaans*, as this was the language of business, and the language that the candidates spoke on a daily basis<sup>61</sup>. The programme was successfully converted to *Afrikaans*, and mediated by *Afrikaans*-speaking facilitators. The candidates completed their screening assessment and wrote their journals in *Afrikaans*. This demonstrated the adaptability of the model, subject to the availability of facilitators and assessors who are fluent in the required language.

### ***Adaptability of the programme***

Although the model was designed around the National Certificate: Food and Beverage Packaging Operations, the concept could be extended to a variety of occupational qualifications. Its success in the Food and Beverage Packaging environment suggests that it could be replicated in a variety of Food and Beverage Manufacturing situations, and possibly extended to other forms of manufacturing. Critical for the success of the programme however, is ensuring that the level of the entering candidates is sufficient to cope with the model's requirements. In particular, candidates require a minimum level of literacy. Specifically within the Food and Beverage Manufacturing sector, this may prove to be a barrier to

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<sup>61</sup> The initial programme was completed in English.

further roll-outs. Thought needs to be put into how the model could be adapted for use in such situations.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a model for use in a manufacturing environment, the Food and Beverage sector RPL programme has potential to be replicated across various contexts, provided that its process and value are understood by the stakeholders involved. While it may not be as cost effective as employers think it should be, the RPL programme adds value for both the candidates and any company prepared to commit to its success.

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# PAPER 5



# **Building Trust to Cross a Conceptual Divide: Credible Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Two Case Studies**

*Dr Shirley Lloyd*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to build trust and professional capacity to deliver the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), by proposing answers to two questions: 'Is RPL necessary?', 'Who benefits from implementing RPL?' I have worked with RPL policy and implementation for years, conscious of the fact that although RPL has been in the policy, teaching and learning spaces for a long time, there is insufficient 'confluence' yet in the education and training system, to generate 'conceptual confluence', and there is a lack of trust in implementing RPL to scale. I have also found that policies are not necessarily an accurate reflection of fairness in RPL processes. Attempting to answer the questions into which two case studies are woven is one attempt to provide empirical evidence, and to 'grow knowledge' about how to design, develop and implement credible and reliable RPL solutions in different contexts.

## **BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this paper is to contribute towards building trust and professional capacity to deliver the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), by proposing answers to two questions: 'Is RPL necessary?', 'Who benefits from implementing RPL?' As Isaacs (2012:99) said, "I cannot claim a neutral stance, nor do I wish to". In this paper, I use two case studies derived from work I have done, which provide empirical evidence about RPL implementation in two contexts.

I have worked with RPL policy and implementation for years. Examples of this work include developing and implementing RPL policy in my capacity as Senior Manager in a Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA). I designed and

implemented numerous RPL models both in the SETA, and in South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) projects, and other initiatives. As the Director of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Directorate in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), I coordinated the development of the RPL Coordination Policy for the Minister of Higher Education and Training. I also evaluated the implementation of RPL, during my tenure as Director: NQF. My Doctoral thesis is titled *Recognition of Prior Learning as a Social Entrepreneurial Praxis*.

My research and practical implementation of RPL at diverse levels, have made me conscious of the fact that although RPL has been in the policy, teaching and learning spaces for a long time, there is insufficient 'confluence' yet in the education and training system, to engender 'conceptual confluence', let alone enough trust to implement RPL to scale. I have also found that policies are not necessarily an accurate reflection of fairness in RPL processes.

The current conflicted RPL policy landscape has increased the complexity and diminished the trust in the ability of the system to deliver RPL credibly and reliably. Munby and Fullan (2016:2) state that "the complexities of systems can have unintended or unforeseen consequences. *Ad hoc* policies undercut coherence and focus". For the changes envisaged – to understand, trust and implement RPL – we need to develop "refocused leadership 'finesse' to deal with deeply ensconced habits and approaches towards RPL. The prolonged ineffectiveness [*sic*] to implement RPL, has resulted in a loss of appetite for leading system change" (*Ibid.*:3). It is clear that 'top-down' change driven by policy frameworks have not worked; and 'bottom-up' change has been incoherent, too variable and uneven" (*Ibid.*:4). Mukora (2008) cited by Lloyd (2017) recognised that RPL is contested – because key role players reflect differing and sometimes conflicting perceptions and approaches to education and training. This lack of common ground makes implementation difficult. Answering the two questions, into which the two case studies are woven, is one attempt to provide empirical evidence and to 'grow knowledge' about how to design, develop and implement credible and reliable RPL solutions in different contexts.

## IS RPL NECESSARY?

### *First answer to the question*

The first answer to the question, '*Is RPL necessary?*' lies in the need to address the scarred and ugly past of a "legalised and institutionalised system of racism and discrimination in terms of gender, race, class and religion against 80% of its population" (Walters, 2012:159), by democratising education and training opportunities for all. As early as 1948, the National Party government intensified the *apartheid* system "to an unendurable degree, at the very time when racialist and colonialist theories and practices were discredited and condemned throughout the world" (Turok, 2012:52). Isaacs and Nkomo (2012:101) remind us that "This has become the lodestone that weighs South Africa down, and undermines its potential in profound ways".

The trajectory of RPL development in South Africa has its roots in the labour movement in the country as far back as the 1970s. By the 1980s, the entire education system had been discredited and rejected by the majority of its people. In 1989 the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), established a research group comprising workers and union officials, to formulate recommendations on training. Their proposal stressed the need for the portability and national recognition of training, so that workers would not be at the mercy of a single employer. The proposal was formally adopted by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in July 1991. The National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI) reports and framework published in 1992 were premised upon the principles of non-racism, non-sexism, democracy and redress, and the need for a non-racial unitary system of education and training<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> NEPI was a project conceptualised at a meeting of the Education Policy Units (EPUs), with 'RES A' ('Research on Education in South Africa') – an underground entity based in London – to plan for the coordination of the EPUs. The EPUs were an initiative of the African National Congress (ANC), established in the early 1990s after its unbanning, to develop education policy for the post-1994 period in South Africa (1994 denoting the onset of democracy in the country, being the first year when all people could vote).

The year 1994 saw the publication of three documents which laid the foundation for the South African Qualifications Authority Act (SAQA) Act No. 58 of 1995 (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995a). These were the African National Congress (ANC) Policy Framework for Education and Training (ANC, 1994)<sup>63</sup>; the Discussion Document on a National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) (1994)<sup>64</sup>; and the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) Implementation Plan for Education and Training (1994), referred to as the IPET document<sup>65</sup>. White Papers on Reconstruction and Development (RSA, 1994) and Education and Training (RSA, 1995b) followed; both underscored the need for the development and implementation of the NQF, which included a central focus on RPL. The concept of what the South African NQF should encompass, had been envisaged as, "...a universal system of quality assured standards and qualifications embracing all education, training and skills development at all levels, both in the workplace and in learning institutions" (Department of Education and Department of Labour [DoE-DoL] Joint Policy Statement, 2007:2).

"The adoption of the NQF was a response to two fundamental imperatives: the first was the need to democratise education and training opportunities across race, gender, class; and secondly, it was a response to the existential reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – that is, globalisation" (Isaacs and Nkomo, 2012:102). Isaacs (2012:76) highlights the social uses of an NQF, by proposing that, "the essential nature of the NQF is that of a social construct in that we use social society not only to theorise about, construct, and implement it, but we also enable, activate, change or work against it". NQFs play central roles in the validation and regulation of prior learning. In the SAQA Act (RSA, 1995a) and the NQF Act (RSA, 2008), RPL policy development and implementation are central tenets, embedded in the objectives of the NQF.

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<sup>63</sup> The ANC was the largest political formation in the liberation movement in pre-democratic South Africa.

<sup>64</sup> The NTSI was developed by the National Training Board, a historical entity for coordinating training in the country, dissolved in the 1990s democratic South Africa.

<sup>65</sup> The CEPD was one of the Education Policy Units (EPU) in the ANC's EPU initiative of the 1990s.

The policy and regulatory frameworks developed in the 25 years spanning the promulgation of the SAQA Act to date have been constructed purposefully to 'democratise' education and training. The policy frameworks have deliberately set out to expand the reach of the system, to target groups who did not have the opportunities due to the pre-1994 exclusionary and racially-based segregation policies of the time. These people/ groups are in need of RPL, through which they could have opportunities to enter mainstream learning, work and self-employment. Large numbers of people in the country comprise an untapped 'pipeline' of knowledge, skills, and experience – developed over the years in non-formal, informal, and workplace contexts. For these people, the opportunities created through RPL could provide personal, social, and economic benefits. Their inclusion in workplaces and learning spaces could have national benefits as well, as numbers of recognised skilled and knowledgeable people would be able to be employable, become self-employed, generate sustainable livelihoods, create employment, and help to grow the economy. For this to happen, RPL policies need to allow for flexibility, while at the same time ensuring and assuring quality.

### ***Second answer to the question***

The second answer to the question, 'Is RPL necessary?' lies in developing sustainable and enabling mechanisms to respond to 'the existential reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries – that is globalisation'. We are living in a world where change is constant, and trends are emerging which are shaping the future of work and economies globally. Lloyd (2017:6) cites Fullan (2001) who wrote that, "the significant impact of societal, workforce, economic, political, and geo-political changes which are occurring rapidly, will not be predictable and will be non-linear".

The fourth industrial revolution (4IR)/ technology, climate change, 'green economies', the future of work, globalisation and people migration, and demography, are some of the areas where the most impactful change is predicted to happen. It is predicted by scholars writing in numerous studies, such

as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2018) research, and the World Economic Forum (WEF) (2015) study, that many jobs will become obsolete; that new job creation opportunities are also expected, based on technological and other changes. Some scholars, whose work is published in these reports, have been considering the potential of new technologies to create new jobs, and envisioning which new jobs might exist in the future. People who are working in highly digitised and technology-rich environments globally are already moulding the new knowledge and skills required for the 4IR and beyond. They are already innovating and creating the new workplaces and jobs, by 'making the road as they go'.

I propose that the existential realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and globalisation require us to interrogate the social uses of qualifications and RPL, and how and where learning takes place. Traditional, formal modes of teaching and learning seem not to be equipped well enough anymore, to fulfill the expectations of individuals and communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lloyd (2017) acknowledges that there is a growing demand by adults and young people, for the formal recognition and validation of the knowledge, skills and competences which they have acquired in a variety of learning contexts. It is suggested that RPL is one of the most important mechanisms to position people to learn and work in the current and future globalised society.

This view appears to be confirmed by a number of scholars. Fenwick (2010:2) states, "the critical problem lies in mistaking learning as a single object, when in fact it is enacted as multiple objects, as different things in different logics and practice". She asks (*Ibid.*), "what knowledge counts most in a global society?" Luksha *et al* (2015) emphasise the need for future employees to develop 'cross-professional skills' in order to remain competitive, and to stay in demand while changing industries. The ILO (2017) and Nadler (2010) point to the importance of managing transitions to new qualifications and locations, which will remain important for workers. Walters (2010:1-2) writes about lifelong learning as being "intimately related to NQFs as it requires an integrated, connected-up approach to development. Qualifications are key units of transaction in societies; finding national, regional, and global mechanisms to have qualifications 'talk to one

another' in systemic ways has become compelling". Walters (*ibid.*) suggests that, "NQFs require communication, collaboration and coordination across diverse parts of society in pursuit of lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning, both in theory and practice". Roseveare (2010) points to the fact that NQFs are mechanisms to improve lifelong learning along with sets of policies, including Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), RPL, and others.

### ***So is RPL necessary?***

Two answers to the first question 'Is RPL necessary?' emerge. I propose that RPL is an important mechanism in the democratisation of education, training and work opportunities in South Africa. And that RPL is an important mechanism to validate and recognise the knowledge, skills and competences already developed/ learned in diverse contexts, to improve lifelong, life-wide and life-deep learning in the fast-changing future of work, the 4IR, and similar future 'revolutions'.

### **WHO BENEFITS FROM RPL IMPLEMENTATION?**

The proposed answers to the first question already provide the basis for the answer to the second question which is, 'Who benefits from RPL implementation?' I suggest that RPL implementation builds a bridge between the worlds of those who were 'left-behind' in the suppressive South African education, training and work environments, and enabling cross-over into opportunities to build professional and personal 'capital', through democratising education and training opportunities. This is just part of an answer, however, to build the trust that will engender a streamlined policy environment and conceptual confluence in approaches to RPL. The two case studies that follow are used to answer the question posed in this section of the paper. It is recognised that part of the mistrust about RPL lies in some poor practices from the past, in which the integrity of the RPL process has been brought into question. RPL practice should be strengthened to grow trust, and accountable and responsible professional practice in its implementation.

Walters (2015:110) acknowledges that, “qualification frameworks are undoubtedly contestable artefacts of modern society”. I take the liberty to extend the notion of contestation to include RPL. Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008:1) found that “the failure of implementation could lie in expectations that education would lead to transformation, without paying the necessary attention to implementation and capacity”. Allais (2014) had difficulty accepting what she perceived to be a weakened stance in the ‘*acquisition* of bodies of knowledge’.

Both case studies discussed in this paper demonstrate carefully ‘curated’ approaches to RPL which is holistic, rather than using ‘tick boxes’ in which competencies are merely acknowledged as being presented in a ‘Portfolio of Evidence’ for assessment. The approaches described in the case studies deliberately intended to provide honest, valid and authentic assessments, to recognise and validate the knowledge, skills and competencies built up by people through life experience, and non-formal and informal learning contexts.

Usher (2018:200) states that “a learning focus on experience certainly has the potential to be ‘liberating’ in its concern for the ‘neglected learner’ and its opposition to ‘banking’ education, in that it highlights and confers meaning on knowledge, skills and attitudes previously undervalued, and motivates students to extend their learning and pursuit of knowledge”. Yet the focus on experience can also be ‘domesticating’, in that learners can become “un-reflexive prisoners of their experience, or have their experiences colonised and reduced. Such approaches run the risk of selling learners short on culturally valued knowledge and, at worst, lock them into second-best knowledge and, through uncritical and un-rigorous approaches to recognising and accrediting prior learning from experience, even into second-best qualifications” (*Ibid.*:201). Brookfield (1993:27) states that, “educators need to move beyond [RPL] practice based on overly simplistic observations, and look more carefully at the necessary preconditions for experiential learning. Part of this might involve working towards building the necessary psychological climate and infrastructure from which experience can be both explored and problematised. This might mean creating sufficient student security and self-confidence, and the ‘right’ emotional tone under which authentic discourse can occur”.

## CASE STUDY 1: RPL FOR PROMOTION

RPL is generally accepted as an instrument to enhance people's access into further studies, and to enable a student to be granted credit for some modules of learning, towards the achievement of a qualification<sup>66</sup>. RPL applications and assessments are used for a number of purposes, namely: RPL for access, RPL for credit, RPL towards/for a qualification or part-qualification, RPL towards/for a professional designation, and RPL for consideration for a post and/or shortlisting for a post. RPL for all of these purposes, has been successfully conducted over a number of years. In recent years I have been approached to consider developing and designing RPL instruments for the promotion of candidates in workplaces. Some of the latest work in which I have been involved, is contextualised within the formal world of employment in provincial and national government departments in South Africa. Case Study 1 comprises the case of one candidate who applied for a job in a national government department. The RPL approach used proved successful in that, (i) it did not 'domesticate' the candidate's experience; (ii) the student was an integral part of the RPL process; and (iii) a positive and conducive climate had been created. Individual candidates could present authentic and credible evidence, which was assessed against the learning outcomes in the registered qualifications concerned, in a valid and credible way.

In this case I was requested to conduct an RPL assessment for Mr F. The request came from the branch of a government department, to confirm Mr F's suitability for the position for which he had applied, which was a Deputy Director post as per the Public Service job levels.

### ***Step 1: Confirmation of the design and role of the NQF in RPL design and implementation***

RPL assessment relies on the construct of the NQF to ensure that the assessment is credible, relevant and pitched at the correct level for the qualification

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<sup>66</sup> These possibilities are expressed in South African national policies for RPL (SAQA, 2013; 2016; 2019 and DHET, 2016).

requirement. In Case 1, the desired qualification was an NQF Level 7 Bachelor's Degree, or 360-credit Diploma. The qualifications on the NQF are registered with Exit Level Outcome (ELO) statements, or Learning Outcome and Specific Outcome statements. These statements were used to guide the content of the discussions with Mr F.

The NQF Level Descriptors are important, as they are used to pitch the level of questions and discussion in assessing the readiness of a potential candidate, for an RPL process. In the case of Mr F, the discussion was focused on the NQF Level 7 outcomes, an evaluation and the comparability of work done, the nature of the experience gained, and previous qualifications, which could be assessed in terms of what was expected for an NQF Level 7 qualification of the type needed. We discussed the fact that the candidate's responses would also be expected to address the elements which the job specifications required.

The candidate's RPL assessment relied on the construct of the NQF to ensure that it was credible, relevant and pitched at the correct levels for the job and qualification requirements. In the case of Mr F, I used a similar RPL assessment approach to one used with numbers of other 'RPL-for-promotion' candidates; an approach which has credibility, has been applied a number of times, and can be verified. In this process, I used the NQF Level Descriptor policy (SAQA, 2012); the assessment had to be appropriate for the NQF Level 7 qualification required.

## ***Step 2: Guiding the candidate***

Generically in RPL processes, it is important that candidates are guided initially, as to what RPL is, what it comprises, and the different approaches for conducting RPL. In Case 1, the candidate was made aware that the same considerations around questions and answers that would be required in a classroom assessment, were required in RPL – the difference being that the RPL candidate had to provide the evidence which was used to assess each of the learning outcomes stated in the associated registered qualifications. It was explained that the evidence provided, would be matched to the actual qualification outcomes, and

that the evidence could be presented in numbers of ways. These ways were determined after discussion with Mr F, and were nuanced so that they applied to the context of a candidate seeking promotion.

In Step 2, we explored the opportunity of being shortlisted for the post, through an RPL intervention. I explained what RPL is, and how RPL works. This was an important part of the process, as Mr F needed to feel confident that this was the route he wanted to take. It also engendered confidence in RPL as a process, and provided him with an understanding of his own knowledge, skills, and competences, based on his experience gained over a number of years.

### ***Step 3: Equivalence mapping and comparability***

The next component of the RPL process was the equivalence mapping, or comparability mapping of the job description requirements, to Mr F's actual work and experience. This was an important step, as the candidate was able to engage analytically, cognitively, logically, and honestly, with his own knowledge and skills and appropriate experience, comparing what he had already achieved, to the post requirements for which he had applied and for which he had hoped to be shortlisted.

Mr F conducted the mapping exercise and gave me the necessary 'mapping document'. I then assessed it, and also conducted a comparability exercise against the selected relevant qualification registered on the NQF. This was done to ensure that the mapping was done at the appropriate level, and to prepare for the level and types of questions that would be asked in the oral assessment component. Through this exercise we both achieved sound understanding of the types of activities that would be performed in the actual job, and the levels at which these activities would need to be performed (and would later be captured in the Performance Agreement). The mapping exercise conducted by the candidate also provided an opportunity to assess his analytical, cognitive and logical thinking skills.

#### ***Step 4: Presentation and evaluation of the portfolio of evidence***

Mr F completed a thorough, clear, well-structured, logically arranged and reflective portfolio of evidence. He also provided a number of examples of work that he had done, to illustrate his suitability for the post. These additional reports and documents provided authentic examples of his knowledge about the issues he had dealt with, and with which he would need to deal in the future. They demonstrated his ability to understand systems and people, and use problem-solving skills to resolve workplace issues or plan new and innovative solutions.

It is usually at this stage that an RPL candidate will either show significant comparability, or will demonstrate gaps which can be filled through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or further upskilling. In this case, Mr F showed exceptional skills and abilities in all of the aspects of the job for which he was applying.

#### ***Step 5: Oral interview and confirmation***

As agreed in the initial interview with Mr F, an oral interview followed; he was interviewed for about 70 minutes, and I asked him a range of questions about the prospective job. I also asked what he had done in the work he had already been doing; how he had approached, and would approach, numerous aspects of the job; what new and different elements he had brought to the job; and what he would do to enhance the service offered within the department and to the public, in the new job. I made notes during the oral assessment, which served as credible evidence as well. We engaged in deeper discussion about aspects that lay especially in the heuristic and cognitive spaces. We also spoke about systems issues and improvements to systems such as efficiencies, cost-saving, and honesty.

Mr F answered each complex question with confidence, broad and deep knowledge, and cognitive understanding, at levels appropriate to those at which he would need to function in the new job. He also offered sound systems advice,

which he underpinned with feasible and implementable action plans. Because the post for which he had applied was a sensitive one, I assessed his values, ethics and understandings of risk and his responsibility to the Minister, and to all staff in the Department. He also provided further inputs about improving current procedures and processes towards efficiencies and cost-effectiveness. I probed his ability to manage a team in a complex, difficult and risk-driven work environment, and he demonstrated clear understandings of teamwork and team direction.

It is important that candidates feel that RPL assessment processes are fair, credible, and that they have been given every opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and experience, towards the desired outcomes of the assessment. Mr F assured me that he felt comfortable with the process followed. He was satisfied that he had been given an opportunity in a fair and transparent way.

A report and evidence were submitted to the relevant branch in the Department, and were used to include Mr F. in the shortlisted candidate list.

## **CASE STUDY 2: RPL FOR A PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATION**

The South African Sports Coaching Association (SASCA) has replaced the original professional body for Sport Coaching which was managed by the South African Sports Confederation and Olympics Committee (SASCOC). SASCA is currently implementing a Long-Term Coach Development (LTCD) programme, which was approved as the South African programme for Coach Development, by the Minister of Sport, SASCOC, all the national sports federations, SAQA, and other stakeholders involved in Coach education, mentoring and development, and the delivery of related programmes at all levels. Nine professional designations were designed and are registered on the NQF, as listed in Table 1.

**Table 1: NQF-registered professional designations in Sports Coaching and Coach Development (Source: National Learners’ Records Database [NLRD], South Africa)**

SPORTS COACHING PATHWAY	COACH DEVELOPER PATHWAY
❑ Master Coach (NQF 9)	❑ NCEA (NQF 9)
❑ Senior Coach (NQF 8)	❑ NCD (NQF 8)
❑ Coach (NQF 7)	❑ PCD (NQF 7)
❑ Coach Assistant (NQF 5)	❑ Assistant PCD (NQF 6)
❑ Apprentice Coach (NQF 4)	

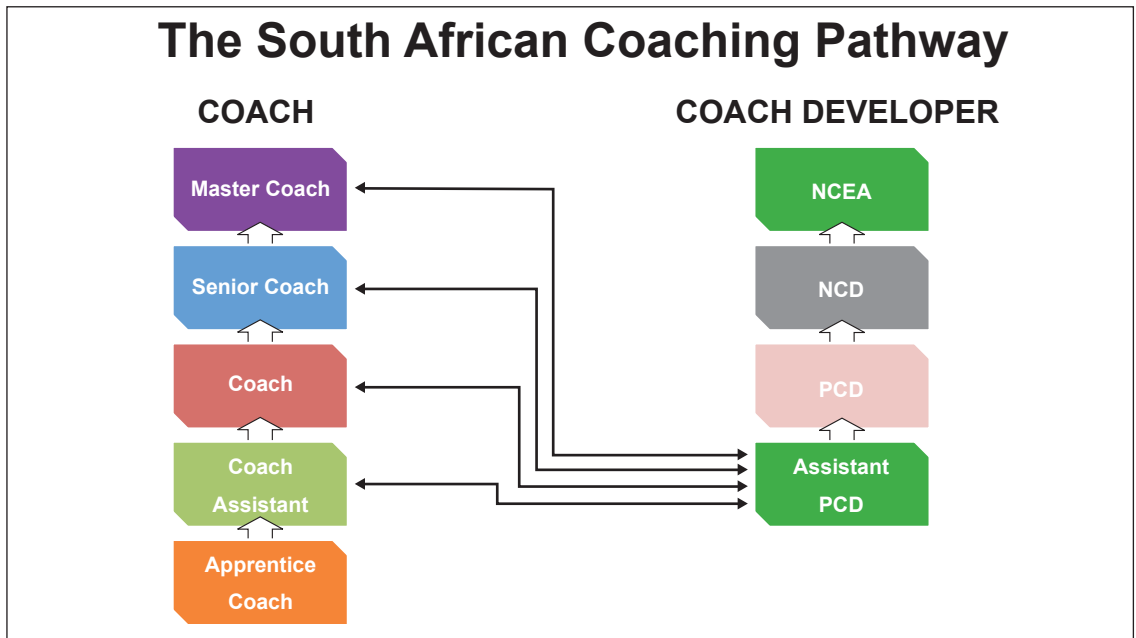
Key:

NCEA = National Coach Education Advisor

NCD = National Coach Developer

PCD = Provincial Coach Developer

Figure 1 below shows the nine professional designations for Coaching, together with their NQF levels and the progression pathways.



**Figure 1: Coaching designations with associated NQF levels**

Key:

NCEA=National Coach Education Advisor

NCD=National Coach Developer

PCD=Provincial Coach Developer

A new legal framework for all people involved in Sport Coaching and Coach Education, is being finalised through the mechanism of the National Sport and Recreation Amendment Bill, No. 43 of 2018, now the B-Bill 2020, prepared by the Department of Sport and Recreation. This Bill requires any person involved in Sport Coaching at any level, and Sports Coaching Advisors, to hold a designation awarded by a professional body.

In order to ensure that Coaches and Coach Education Advisors can be awarded designations at levels approved by their National Federations, a national and province-wide RPL project is underway. This project builds on a pilot launched in 2014, in partnership with SAQA; the Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA); SASCO, and the National Federations. The pilot provided empirical evidence of successful RPL implementation for designations, and a means of conducting RPL for awarding these to members of the Sports Coaching and Sport Education Advisor fraternity.

Due to the importance of this project and its provincial, national and international visibility – especially for the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) – the RPL process had to be credible, feasible, relevant, valid and generalisable. The RPL process for professional designations comprises a number of quality assurance steps/ sub-processes, which are similar to those used in the case of RPL for promotion (as well as for RPL for access, and RPL for credit). The nuanced difference is that in the presentation of the Portfolio of Evidence, each candidate provides a written/ typed version of the Portfolio, which follows the professional body requirements to be awarded a designation. This is assessed and moderated. Parallel to this process, each candidate undergoes the oral interview stage in the form of a presentation (via video, Power Point, or actual footage of work done). This is followed by an ‘on-site demonstration’ by the candidate, of actual fieldwork. The development of the RPL assessment tool therefore comprised the engagement with the candidate (Steps 1, 2, 3); the assessment and moderation of the candidate’s Portfolio of Evidence *and other related evidence*, including the interview and site visit (Step 4); the writing of the necessary reports (Step 5); and the final awarding of the designation.

Two examples of designations and associated criteria are provided in Table 2; the first is for a Senior Coach and the second, for a National Coach Education Advisor.

The written/ typed component of the Portfolio of Evidence covers the necessary cognitive, analytical, knowledge, and skills competencies, and the practical application elements expected of Coaches and Coach Education Advisors. The oral interviews and site visits provide opportunities for candidates to expand on, and demonstrate, particular elements as needed.

**Table 2: Descriptions of Sports Coaching designations and core competencies**

Senior Coach	
Criterion for the designation	Description
Underlying NQF-registered qualification/ part-qualification	Diploma: Officiating and Coaching, NQF Level 6; <u>or</u> Diploma: Sport Management and Coaching, NQF Level 6; <u>or</u> Advanced Certificate: Fitness Conditioning Coach, NQF Level 6
Practical learning	Candidates must have over seven years of experience as a Coach, and a proven track record of coaching at continental/ national level. Athletes or teams must ranked amongst the top 10 internationally, in a specific sporting code. Mentoring other Coaches is a further requirement
Board/ Admission examination/ assessment	Applications for the designation should be accompanied by a letter of endorsement from the Sports Federations. After receiving such endorsement, the South African Sports Coaching Association (SASCA) decides on awarding the designation
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	Senior Coaches are expected to complete and record at least 20 CPD points per year, within a reporting period of two years
Application for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	This designation can be achieved through RPL. An application is lodged with the Sports Federations. The Federations conduct RPL assessments with the assistance from the SASCA RPL panel, which is externally moderated

<b>National Coach Education Advisor</b>	
<b>Criterion for the designation</b>	<b>Description</b>
Underlying NQF-registered qualification/ part-qualification	Postgraduate Diploma: Education; Education Management, NQF Level 8; <u>or</u> Any related NQF Level 8 qualification
Practical learning	Candidates must have over 10 years of relevant experience as a Coach
Board/ Admission examination/ assessment	Applications to be considered for this designation should be accompanied by a letter of endorsement from the Sports Federations. After receiving such endorsement, the SASCA decides on awarding the designation
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)	At least 40 CPD points per year must be completed and recorded by the candidates
Application for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	This designation can be achieved through RPL. An application is lodged with the Federations. SASCA conducts RPL through the SASCA RPL panel, which is externally moderated

It was found that the RPL assessment tool could be used as a model from which future assessment tools could be designed. The RPL partnership has shown that RPL as a method for awarding designations is appropriate, credible, valid, relevant and generalisable. It can be applied relatively cost-effectively for large numbers of candidates at the same time. The desired outcomes of the long-term Coaching Framework are the development of Coaches and Coach Developers for the professionalisation of sport, ensuring that no child is left behind, and ultimate excellence in athletes' performance. Through RPL, we can ensure that current Coaches and Coach Developers have opportunities to be awarded appropriate designations.

## **CONCLUSION**

The intention of this paper was to build trust in RPL implementation by ‘show-casing’ two RPL projects in the case studies described. There was an intention to answer two key questions, ‘Is RPL necessary?’ and ‘Who benefits from RPL?’ In answering these questions, I have proposed that RPL is necessary as an instrument to support the democratisation of education and training in South Africa, and that RPL implementation derives its authenticity and credibility from carefully curated RPL processes that are liberating, innovative and expansive. I believe that we are at the cusp of “transferring the learning from pockets of success, into system change” (Munby and Fullan, 2016:4). To do this, we need to increase collaboration and collective agency, with a view to generating the measurable impact on peoples’ individual lives, and on the greater societal and economic good of the country.

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<sup>67</sup> Historical entity that no longer exists; the NTB was replaced by the NQF system (SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995), in 1996.

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# **PAPER 6**



# **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Against a Professional Designation: Institute for Work-at-Height approach as a Non-Statutory Professional Body**

*Dr Alti Kriel*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper deals with the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and experience of tradespersons and other workers who are exposed to dangers while working at height. In the paper, the writer attempts to explain the meaning of 'Work-at-Height' in the context of completing a specific job at height and how, and in which situations, it can also be considered an 'occupation' in its own right. The writer gives examples of RPL projects attempted in the industry of Work at Height, as part of regulated skills, and for certain South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)-registered designations (or underlying unit standards for the regulated skills).

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Institute for Work-at-Height (IWH) was one of the first of its kind – a 'non-statutory' professional body – to be recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in December 2012. The application to register this body came from a community of expert practitioners, who established the IWH Trade Association to provide a common voice on behalf of the 'Work-at-Height' industry.

With Work-at-Height being the common denominator and the realisation that good training in these sectors is one of the main solutions to clamp down on the many height-related injuries and fatalities, this community of expert practitioners met on a regular basis to discuss possible solutions to the challenges. The result was the registration of the professional body IWH, with SAQA.

The IWH soon became a 'key player' in the development of, and guidance for, the relevant training and compliance processes for working at height. As the main foci of the Quality Councils and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)<sup>68</sup> are on full- and part-qualifications, and given that the concept of 'working at height' is not really familiar to them, it became clear that the IWH would need to provide guidance for the way forward.

Generally, trade associations such as the IWH are the preferred source of guidance for the specialised and regulated training needs. Such associations represent the voice of the industry. The member organisations that make up the professional body provide the industry expertise necessary to guide the professional body. The IWH, as is typical for professional bodies, has a Committee of Expert Practitioners (CEP). This Committee is made up of key stakeholders drawn from different interest groups, specialists in the sub-fields involved, organised labour, and organised business.

## ***Recognition of Prior Learning***

The IWH had to start focusing on RPL towards its professional designations for various reasons, which are explained in the paper. It soon became clear that RPL routes towards professional designations within the Work-at-Height industry, were not impossible. These routes did however need careful planning, and very experienced assessors to conduct the RPL assessments specifically – otherwise the gaps would not be visible, and in this industry, an incompetent person can cause a fatality or lose his/her own life.

This paper first looks at the current legislation that governs the Work-at-Height industry. Thereafter it focuses on the role of the IWH in the recognition of employees working at height. Understandings of RPL in the industry are

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<sup>68</sup> The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa is made up of three articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks – for General and Further Education and Training, Occupational Qualifications, and Higher Education respectively. There are 21 SETAs in the country; different economic areas have specific SETAs.

addressed briefly, followed by clarification of how RPL is understood in the professional body context. The writer attempts to explain RPL for the skills and knowledge needed for Work-at-Height, specifically for licensing/ regulatory purposes. Some examples and statistics are provided, which clarify the need for this type of RPL. The writer continues with the IWH view of RPL against a SAQA-registered designation, some examples of such RPL undertaken, and concluding comments.

## **LEGISLATION**

In addition to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act<sup>69</sup>, the legislative environment for the industry in which the IWH operates comprises the Occupational Health and Safety Act No. 85 of 1993, with all of its regulations. For the purposes of this paper, the authors refer specifically to the Construction Regulations (2014), and the Driven Machinery Regulations (2015). Both sets of regulations require all tradespersons/ workers exposed to the dangers of working at height, to be correctly trained and certified for Work-at-Height<sup>70</sup>.

## **THE ROLE OF THE IWH IN THE RECOGNITION OF WORK AT HEIGHT**

SAQA defines a 'professional body' as a body of expert practitioners in an occupational field, and this includes an occupational body<sup>71</sup>. In understanding the roles of professional bodies, it is worth mentioning that they are organisations with members who are professionals. In some cases, it is compulsory to be a member of a professional body, but in others, it is not. This practice usually depends on whether or not the profession requires each professional to have a

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<sup>69</sup> SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 was replaced by the NQF Act No. 67 of 2008; the latter was amended in 2019 and is now referred to as the NQF Amendment Act No. 12 of 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Occupational Health and Safety Act No. 85 of 1993; Construction Regulations 2014: Section 9(3).

<sup>71</sup> Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act (SAQA, 2012 as amended in 2018).

'license to practice' or to be on a professional register in order to do their jobs. In the case of the IWH, it is not compulsory to become a member, but due to the high risk environment, the issue of a 'license to practice' has become very important. Whereas the IWH has registered certain professional designations against underlying qualifications, it also recognises certain regulated skills by issuing the non-professional licenses needed for the safe practice of high-risk skills.

The main objectives of the IWH include promoting public understandings of, and trust in, professions relating to Work-at-Height<sup>72</sup>, and also the RPL and experience of persons in the industry – and encouraging the further development of these workers through Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

In achieving these aims, the IWH relies on research into leading international practices, in its areas of concern. As the first of its kind specifically for those working at height and with related skills and professions, we also have to 'make the road as we walk it'.

Nobody can argue with the law of gravity; all Work-at-Height should be considered 'high risk'. It is important to note that Work-at-Height does not only include professions for which there are underlying qualifications, such as that for Scaffolding. It also includes skills such as 'Fall Protection' and 'Rope Access', which are necessary to perform other professions safely. High-risk skills need to be kept updated as the people performing tasks that require them might become complacent and/or forget certain steps needed for safe performance. Other aspects to be considered include new and better equipment for which training may be needed; new legislation and regulations, and medical fitness for Work-at-Height, amongst others. All of the aspects that qualify people for Work-at-Height do not only require initial qualifications for competence, but also licensing and re-licensing.

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<sup>72</sup> Institute for Work at Height Memorandum of Incorporation (MOI).

As the occupational body for all Work-at-Height skills and professions, the IWH relies on the expertise in the industry, and its subject matter experts, to provide the guidance needed for developing the policies and procedures for operations. This guidance is not just for the safety of those in the industry, but also to ensure its practicality and alignment to the relevant legislation and regulations.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE RPL CONTEXT FOR THE 'WORK-AT-HEIGHT' SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A key part of the Work-at-Height context in South Africa is that the country is part of a globalised and fast-changing world characterised by the increasing diversity and flexibility of workplaces and how people work, and the regularisation and mobility of, work. Because of these developments as well as the difficulties that poor, and previously/ currently disadvantaged people have, in accessing formal learning, some workers have been able to obtain skills and knowledge through a range of sources and means wider than those traditionally followed. Recognising the competences that individuals acquire over the courses of their lives, regardless of where or how the skills were acquired, is important for ensuring that workers have evidence for the skills obtained.

A second key feature of the Work-at-Height context is the lack of recognised qualifications in the sector. As a result, a large proportion of people in South Africa face severe disadvantages in getting decent jobs, and in migrating to other regions and accessing further education, even though they might have the necessary knowledge and skills. An RPL process could help such people not only to acquire formal qualifications that match their knowledge and skills, but also contribute to improving their employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion, and self-esteem. RPL is thus of importance for poverty reduction, job-creation and employment.

Thirdly, these realities combined with a general ignorance regarding training specifically for Work-at-Height, led the IWH to focus on guidance, counselling, and extended preparation for assessment in the industry.

In the glossary of terms in SAQA's (2016; 2019) RPL policy, SAQA defines RPL as 'the principles and processes by means of which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development'<sup>73</sup>.

### ***RPL in a professional body context***

RPL for registration against a professional designation in the professional body context differs from RPL against a qualification. Although the words of the definition might be similar, the focus of RPL against a designation differs substantially. The IWH, for example, focuses its RPL processes on inclusion and/or advancement in the *workplace*. Its approach to RPL is a multi-dimensional one, through which non-formal and informal learning, and more specifically workplace-based experience, are recognised.

In her presentation at a seminar on 21 June 2019<sup>74</sup>, Dr Julie Reddy<sup>75</sup> referred to the process of RPL against a professional designation shown in Figure 1. For the purposes of this paper, the author refers specifically to the RPL against a professional designation for the Built Environment, as this approach is close to that followed by the IWH.

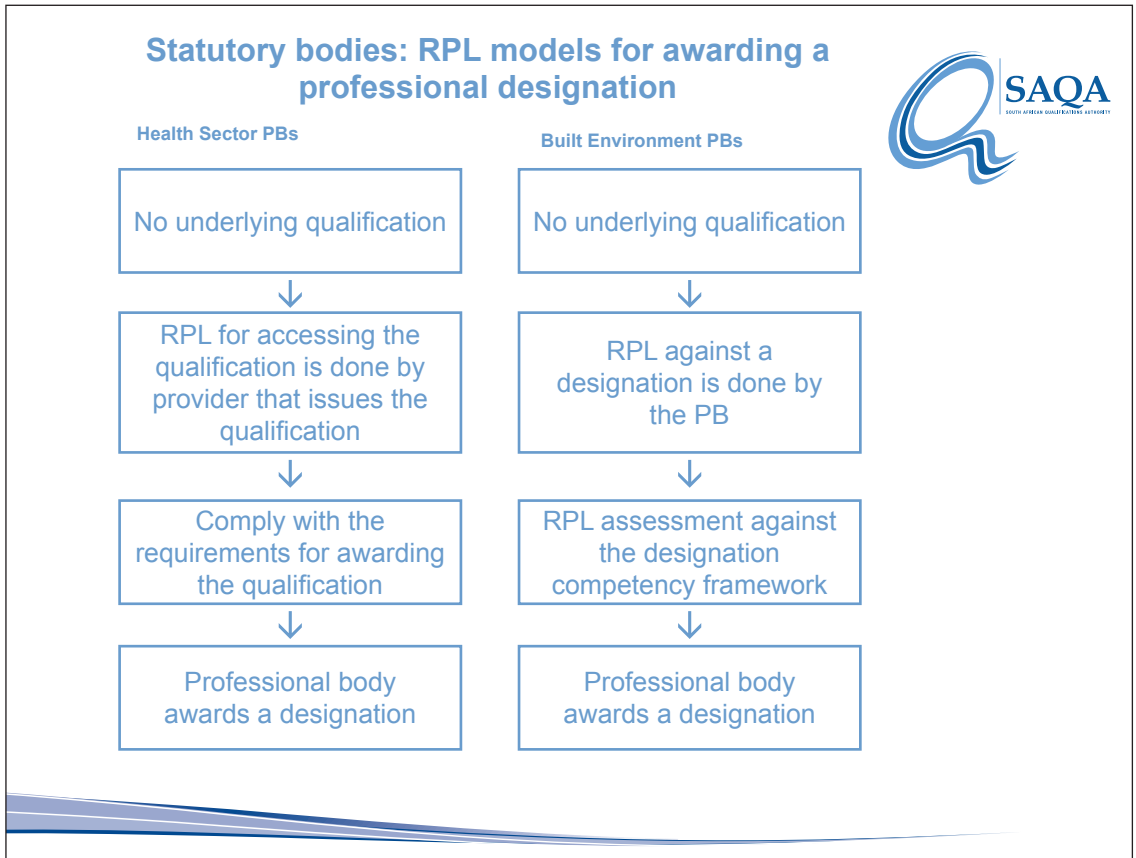
In addressing RPL, the IWH has had to be innovative, as it needs to cater for a variety of occupations. Skills such as those needed for the 'development of a Fall Protection Plan', 'Fall Prevention and Fall Arrest' and 'Rope Access', to name a few, have to be included in the scope of the RPL processes of the IWH.

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<sup>73</sup> National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2016; 2019).

<sup>74</sup> Paper delivered at SAQA's International Seminar on Recognition of Prior Learning for Professional Qualifications and Professional Designations entitled, 'RPL Policies and Practices: SAQA Perspective'.

<sup>75</sup> Dr Julie Reddy is the Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SAQA.



**Figure 1: The process for RPL against a professional designation (Source: SAQA presentation at a SAQA seminar, 21 June 2019)**

## **RPL FOR THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE FOR WORK-AT-HEIGHT, SPECIFICALLY FOR LICENSING/ REGULATORY PURPOSES.**

### ***Safety regulations and RPL***

Working at height involves being able to access the point where the ‘real job’ has to be done. A lot of the workers in South Africa gain their experience whilst performing their actual occupations, and never really get formal training for those specific skills. The regulations for these high risk skills however, have made it compulsory for workers to be trained properly. As a consequence, the workers already in the job market with the necessary skills, (but no qualifications) started

facing significant challenges in maintaining or gaining employment in their occupations.

If a person has performed the working at height-related skills in the workplace for years, these should be recognised. It is imperative that workers' skills gaps are sufficiently identified and addressed to ensure their safety, and that of the public. RPL could also save expenses in instances where people have already gained the skills in a workplace and may not need the full training.

The process of 'licensing' is of critical importance. Licensing embodies 'the right to practice' as defined in SAQA's (2012) policy for recognising professional bodies and registering their professional designations. It is based on the recognition of a person's expertise. The professional designation has an underlying qualification, and both the designation and the qualification point to the competence of the person. Such competence is timeless; however, the professional designation is granted for a specific time-period only. Its retention requires compliance with the stated requirements of the professional body that include CPD<sup>76</sup>. Licensing is the physical proof of the validity of a person's professional designation.

For certain high-risk skills, the 'underlying qualification' could be a single Unit Standard, or a cluster of Unit Standards – but the professional designation is still needed. The person is to be declared competent against the skills in the Unit Standard(s), and receive his/her Statement of Results<sup>77</sup> to prove this competence, and this cannot expire. However, if the industry agrees, these high-risk skills can be 'licensed' to prove that the person is still competent to carry out the skills.

### ***Qualifications/ training and RPL: IWH-Eskom example***

The promulgation and implementation of the Construction Regulations (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2014), cover the maintenance workers who fix and clean

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<sup>76</sup> SAQA's (2012) policy for recognising professional bodies and registering professional designations, as amended in 2018 (Clause 32).

<sup>77</sup> Statements of Results are issued by SETAs as proof of competence against registered Unit Standards.

very high structures, such as those involved in projects linked to Eskom's<sup>78</sup> Medupi Power Station. As these maintenance workers arrive on site to work, the Construction Health and Safety Officers typically want to know if they are medically fit and properly trained for Work-at-Height. This questioning is necessary not only because the regulations are very clear in this regard; there are risks involved when working at height.

Most of these workers would have worked at height before, but because they were not properly trained they might have known just enough to make their work even more dangerous. Training in these skills was not well monitored in the past but now it is also not practical to send these workers away for a number of days at a time if they already have substantial experience in working at height. One of the motivations to include the workers in the RPL initiative was to prevent the situation where work would 'stand still' for two, three, or four days while unnecessary full training took place.

The IWH needed to develop RPL processes for people who carry out Work-at-Height, to enable them to access and/or remain in, workplaces. In the case of the Eskom workers, the IWH developed an RPL initiative for the skills programme consisting of Unit Standard 229998: Explain and Perform Fall Arrest Techniques when working at height (two credits), and for a few other employees who perform basic rescues in the event of fall incidents, Unit Standard 229995: Install, Use and Perform Basic Rescues from Fall Arrest Systems, and Implement the Fall Protection Plan (three credits).

After recognising already-accredited training providers in these areas, one-day training – a shorter version of the normal Unit Standard-based training, and assessment for Work-at-Height (Fall Arrest Training) – was approved for the IWH's RPL initiative. An additional day for those who would have to conduct rescues, was also approved. This training is usually conducted in two and three days respectively, for people who have never worked at height, but the Eskom

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<sup>78</sup> Eskom is the main state power utility in South Africa.

workers had already received either un-accredited or sub-standard training as well as working at height, and only needed top-up training and assessment. The IWH-recognised providers took it upon themselves to check on the past work experience of the candidates, and in some cases the un-accredited training provider certificates were used as proof of prior learning. However, the providers focused mainly on the workers' previous experience in working at height, which could be seen in their CVs, and years of employment – which clearly showed Work-at-Height.

The IWH conducted its own quality assurance on this 'shortened version of training'. This work included ensuring that the training provider was currently accredited with a SETA, had the necessary registered constituent assessors and moderators, and was able to train according to the SETA's current processes, including all the quality assurance processes. The IWH encouraged the provider to ensure that the learners completed Portfolios of Evidence, and provider-uploading of candidate results to the relevant SETA after the RPL process, so that the workers' competences would be recorded against the relevant Unit Standards, registered on the NQF.

To support this process, the IWH established a licensing scheme for the skills needed, to ensure worker compliance to the regulations. In this scheme, workers had to approach any of the IWH-recognised training providers for the shortened version of the training and assessment, and the provider would then register them on the IWH database. After successful completion of the training, a license was issued. This 'license to practice' would expire after three years. Workers would still have their 'Statements of Results' for the competences in the Unit Standard(s) against which they had undergone an RPL process, and which would not expire.

### ***Other IWH training-and-RPL initiatives***

The RPL against other Work-at-Height-related types of skills has expanded and is conducted currently also using the SETA Unit Standard-based training

systems. An example is the RPL for Mobile Elevating Work Platform (MEWP) Operators, using Unit Standard 243272: Operate a Mobile Elevating Work Platform (10 credits). This Unit Standard created extensive complications for the hiring industry in South Africa prior to the RPL initiative, because of the number of credits allocated to achieve this skill. Internationally, it would never take a person 100 notional hours to operate a MEWP. It was impractical to expect a client who wanted to rent such an operator for one day to change a globe that was difficult to reach, to take into account five days of training before this could be done. Internationally this training is no longer than two days. The IWH assisted the industry with the concept of 'shortened training', together with all the quality assurance processes, as well as the submission of a Portfolio of Evidence to the relevant SETA. As in the Eskom RPL initiative, IWH also conducts its own quality assurance to ensure that all the necessary criteria are met. The motive of IWH is also that the economy cannot be hindered by inadequacies in the education and training system/ qualifications.

### **Caveats**

It needs to be emphasised that the RPL processes of IWH are not for the skills needed for people to be competent for the job at hand; the RPL is for the skills needed to *reach the place* where s/he would perform his/her job. These are high-risk skills and ignoring them could cost a worker his/her life.

It also needs to be noted that the RPL processes described are not conducted by the IWH Professional Body itself, and that no common RPL assessment tool was developed. Instead, the IWH relied on its recognised training providers' accreditation with the relevant SETAs, including their SETA-approved training materials, to address the gaps in the workers' experience. IWH further relied on the final practical assessment conducted by a registered constituent assessor. The final assessment record was uploaded to the IWH Professional Body database as proof of competence against the set skills.

## ***IWH statistics for RPL and Work-at-Height realities***

In the period 2012-2019, the IWH registered around 40,000 people against the different unit standards for 'working at height', specifically Unit Standard 229998 and Unit Standard 229995. Working at height training was initially seen as being 'voluntary' in the industry. Over time, the possession of these Unit Standards became a requirement for contracts, especially when the clients issuing tenders added it as a requirement. The industry saw the value of these formal qualifications; the requirements are not only promoted by the IWH.

It is a serious issue that there are tens of thousands of other workers, who are currently practicing these high-risk skills without proper training or licensing. The industry has started to rely on the IWH to regulate these practices, as falls from height are currently rated as the second highest contributor to work-related injuries. Employers are rightly held accountable for the safety of their workers.

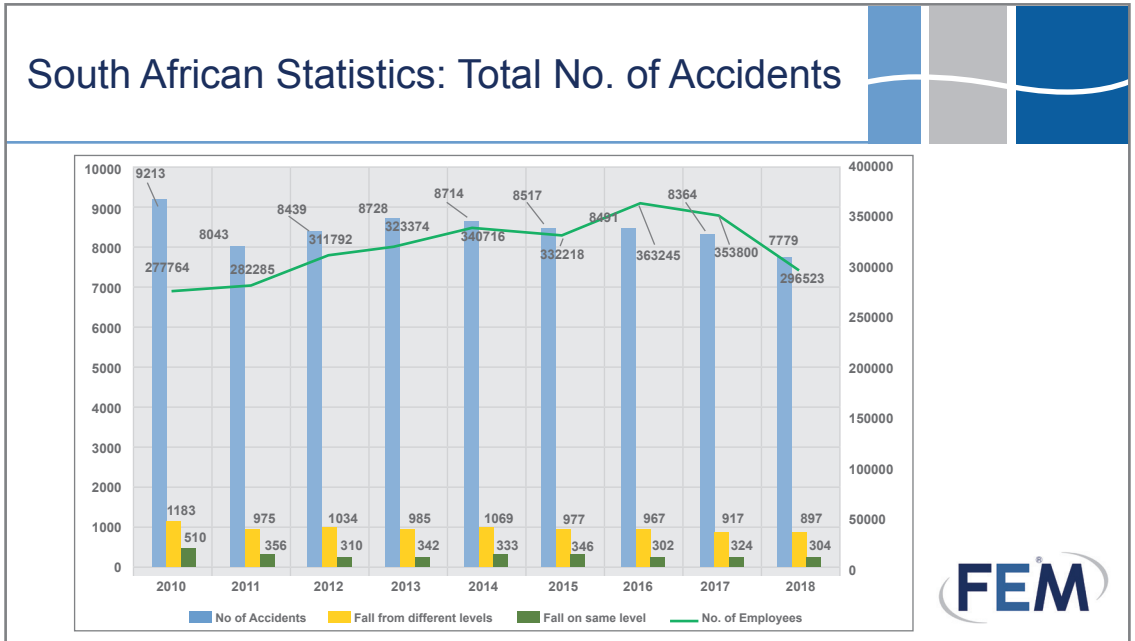
Statistics presented by the Federated Employers' Mutual Assurance Company (FEM)<sup>79</sup> in Figure 2 show the alarming number of Work-at-Height-related accidents. These numbers show only the accidents reported to FEM, and do not represent the total number of Work-at-Height-related accidents in South Africa. It must also be remembered that accidents when working at height could have adverse effect on people's lives and on those of his/her family.

Ideally, nobody should lose their lives when working at height. Figure 3 shows the statistics released by FEM, for the fatalities reported and handled by it.

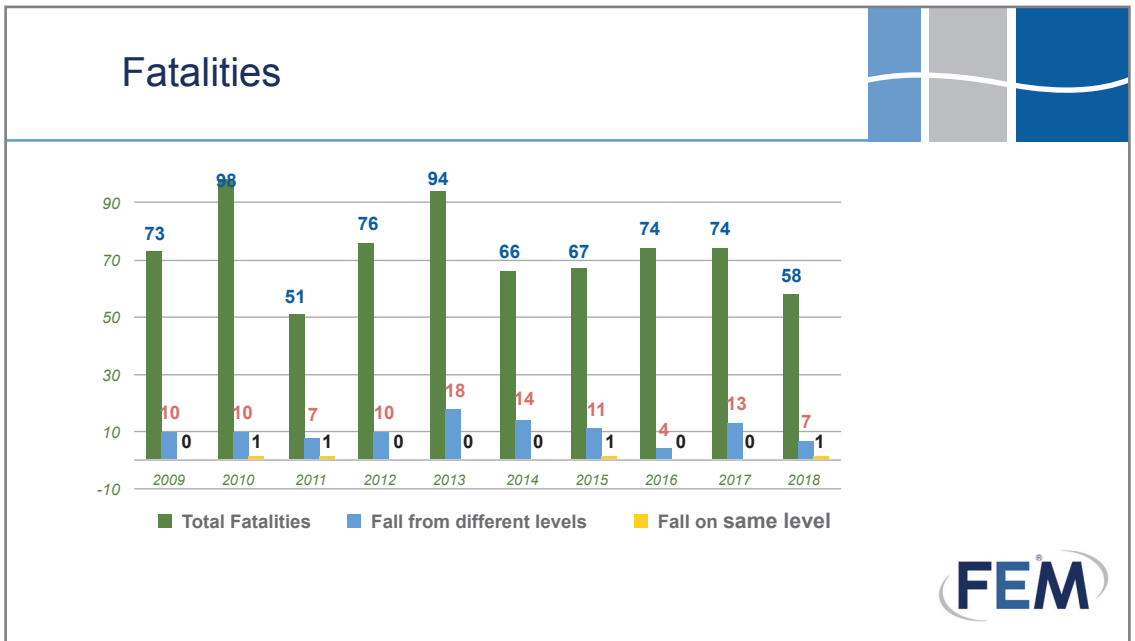
The IWH and its Community of Expert Practitioners seek to ensure proper training so that the accident and fatality statistics show a continuous decline in the immediate as well as in the short-, medium-, and long-term.

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<sup>79</sup> Presentation delivered by Mr Herman Enoch (FEM), at the Master Builders Association Seminar of 21 March 2019.



**Figure 2: Statistics for the number of Work-at-Height-related accidents reported to FEM, 2010-2018 (Source: Presentation by Mr Herman Enoch [FEM] at the Master Builder Association Seminar of 21 August 2019)**



**Figure 3: Statistics showing Work-at-Height-related fatalities reported to FEM, 2010-2018 (Source: Presentation by Mr Herman Enoch [FEM] at the Master Builder Association Seminar of 21 August 2019)**

## **RPL AGAINST IWH'S REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATIONS**

### ***Mandatory RPL route to professional designations***

As a SAQA-recognised professional body, the IWH must specify an RPL route towards its professional designations.

When the IWH sought recognition from SAQA in 2012, it was faced with the difficulty that there were no registered underlying Occupational Qualifications for its professional designations. There were related occupations on the Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO)<sup>80</sup>, but no supporting qualifications. When the IWH was recognised by SAQA, it registered its first professional designations using combinations of historically registered (legacy) Unit Standards as underlying qualifications<sup>81</sup>. This position however needed to be rectified as SAQA indicated that such practices were an interim solution until suitable NQF Act-aligned Occupational Qualification(s) were developed and registered.

One specific occupation stood out as being severely 'neglected' in the construction industry – that of 'Scaffolders'. A long process of negotiations with the relevant SETAs followed, but none of these bodies were interested in developing this relevant Occupational Qualification.

### ***Developing suitable 'base qualifications'***

The IWH was appointed as a Development Quality Partner (DQP) under the auspices of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), to

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<sup>80</sup> Organising Framework for Occupations issued by Department of Higher Education and Training in 2017.

<sup>81</sup> The SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 provided for the first NQF in South Africa. The SAQA Act was replaced with the NQF Act No. 67 of 2008, and the NQF Amendment Act No. 12 of 2019. Qualifications registered under the SAQA Act and the decades before it, are termed legacy qualifications.

facilitate the development of the necessary qualifications<sup>82</sup>. During the initial scoping meetings with the industry, other Occupational Qualifications and part-qualifications related to the Scaffolder qualification were also identified and developed. Some of the qualifications needed OFO codes that did not yet exist: the IWH's applications for the addition of the jobs to the OFO code system was logged through the Construction SETA. Some of these jobs were approved and assigned OFO codes; others were not. The IWH has submitted the new qualifications to the QCTO, for submission to SAQA for registration on the NQF, and is awaiting clarification on certain issues.

### ***Why RPL is needed to achieve the IWH's professional designations***

#### **Scaffolders**

RPL against the IWH-registered professional designations became urgent for different reasons. With regard to the Scaffolders specifically, the IWH knew that there were no holders of scaffolding qualifications on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)<sup>83</sup> other than the historical Unit Standards. In effect, this meant that South Africa does not have 'legally' trained Scaffolders as per the Construction Regulations of 2014. This is an issue for member companies who employ Scaffolders: these companies do not have proof that their Scaffolding employees have been properly trained.

#### **Rope Access employees**

Another reason for the IWH Professional Body to implement RPL against a designation over and above the SAQA requirements was that many Rope

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<sup>82</sup> The QCTO outsources some of its quality assurance functions, to DQPs and Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs), which it accredits according to quality assurance criteria.

<sup>83</sup> The National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) is the relational database of the NQF managed by SAQA. The NLRD contains information on qualifications, part-qualifications, learning achievements, accredited providers, and professional bodies with their professional designations.

Access practitioners in the country are trained against the International Rope Access Association (IRATA) programmes. Although SAQA allowed the IWH to register three designations based on the historical Unit Standards, no suitable QCTO-type Occupational Qualifications existed at the time of SAQA's recognition of the IWH. Currently one Occupational Qualification has been developed for a 'Rope Access Supervisor', but the IWH is still battling with the application to include this occupation on the OFO. The occupation is still relatively new as Rope Access was previously a 'sport' for mountaineers. A couple of years ago, the use of these mountaineers' techniques was implemented to access high-rise buildings for maintenance and cleaning purposes. Although the real job here is not 'hanging on these ropes for a living', the Rope Access Supervisor specifically is an occupation as this person is needed to supervise the group of Rope Access employees on all working sites, so this category of employee is typically appointed permanently in this specific occupation.

## **Safety Officers**

The IWH is currently discussing another RPL initiative for Occupational Health and Safety Practitioners who are registered with the South African Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (SAIOSH)<sup>84</sup>. There is considerable coherence between the safety principles promoted by SAIOSH, and those needed when working at height. Of particular concern for the IWH, is the Safety Officer who has to develop Fall Protection Plans. Because this is an IWH-registered designation, the IWH needs to drive the related RPL process.

## **TASK-BASED MODEL FOR RPL**

The IWH's approach to RPL is different for each of its designations/ licenses. The focus, however, is on the *tasks at hand necessary to complete the job* and not the qualifications as such. The IWH has focused on the development of an RPL process that promotes holistic, task-based assessment, and which focuses

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<sup>84</sup> SAIOSH, like the IWH Professional Body, is recognised by SAQA.

on relating assessment activities to actual job tasks. The intention of this model is to streamline and simplify the recognition processes for prospective candidates.

In developing the RPL assessment instruments, the focus was thus also to support this task-based model. The streamlined holistic assessment process is on demonstrated skills and knowledge, and does not necessarily rely on documentary evidence as the main source of evidence. The IWH Professional Body engaged actively in three RPL initiatives in this area, as discussed in the following sections.

## **RPL FOR SCAFFOLDERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

For the past 20 years, the quality of training within the Scaffold industry in South Africa was severely neglected. With the inception of the IWH, the members represented in the Scaffold Chamber had numerous meetings and requested assistance from the IWH regarding issues with the training of their Scaffolders.

For reasons not known to the members, the training for Scaffolding was reduced to only a few (legacy) Unit Standards registered on the NQF. Internationally, Scaffolding is seen as a fully-fledged profession, and the full set of qualifications has to be acquired to be considered a competent Scaffolders.

Another serious issue was that nobody was 'regulating' the training of Scaffolders, although South African National Standard (SANS) 10085<sup>85</sup> clearly indicates the training progression pathway for a Scaffolders. Providers were training learners for a few days and issuing them with certificates of competence, without the relevant quality assurance body checking on this training, or uploading the learner achievement data to the NLRD.

Scaffold industry members were thus seriously concerned about the poor standards of training of their employees, and requested the intervention of

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<sup>85</sup> The South African National Standards Body (SANS), accredits the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) – a statutory body established in terms of the Standards Act No. 24 of 1945, as Amended in 2008, to test and certify standards. SANS sets standards.

the IWH to resolve the issues. Statistics extracted from the NLRD<sup>86</sup> for the period 2005-2017 showed that no learning achievements had been uploaded to the NLRD for any advanced-level Scaffold training Unit Standards since the registration of these Unit Standards before 2009. In 2014, with the launch of the new Construction Regulations, the definition of 'competence' clearly indicates that the employees' qualifications and learning achievements should be in the NLRD.

### ***First RPL attempts***

Whilst the IWH discussions with SAQA, the QCTO and the relevant SETA for the necessary qualifications were taking place, the IWH decided to assist the Scaffold industry by introducing RPL for Scaffolders in South Africa. For this initiative, the RPL assessment instruments were developed by the Scaffold Community of Expert Practitioners. The implementation however was not easy in that it was difficult to achieve the required high standards of practice needed. The large Scaffold companies whose main focus is the erection of scaffolding, were not happy with the RPL process, as a lot of training was needed. With the fatal collapse of the scaffolding in the construction of the Grayston Drive bridge in 2015<sup>87</sup>, these members approached the IWH to request a serious intervention to enable their employees to be properly trained.

### ***Task-based RPL assessment tool***

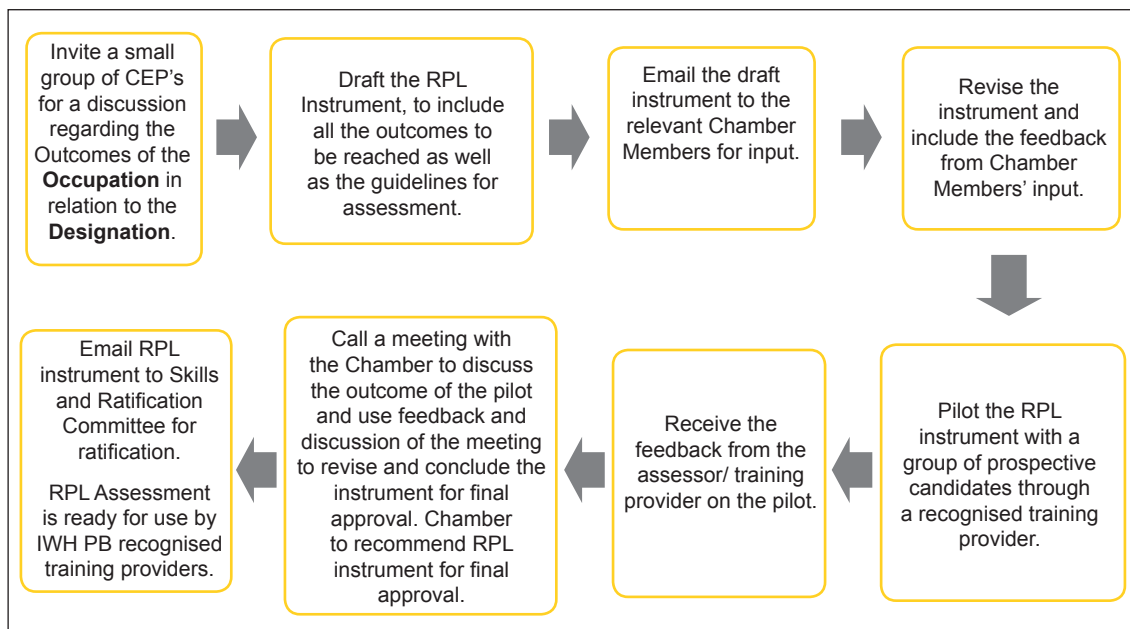
Following the 2015 member request, the IWH developed a task-based RPL assessment tool for the Scaffold employees. The IWH started to implement this model by running a pilot for a group of the employees of one of its members.

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<sup>86</sup> NLRD statistics drawn from SAQA for the period 2005-2017 indicated that no candidates were uploaded for the Scaffolding Erector, Supervisor and Inspector Unit Standards.

<sup>87</sup> The temporary pedestrian and cyclist bridge erected for the construction of the Grayston Drive bridge by the respected company Murray and Roberts, collapsed on 14 October 2015, leading to the deaths of two people and injury to 19 others.

Figure 4 shows the IWH process flow for the development and implementation of an assessment instrument for RPL against one its professional designations.



**Figure 4: IWH process flow for the development and implementation of an assessment instrument for RPL against a professional designation.**

### Task-based RPL process

The development of RPL assessment tools in this initiative focused on the tasks of the specific occupation, and not on the RPL against a qualification. The tasks were set out by a Community of Expert Practitioners for Scaffolding, and were benchmarked to Scaffolders' tasks internationally.

The group for the first pilot<sup>88</sup> comprised employees of one of IWH's member companies, and the workers were in full-time employment of the company. Fourteen (14) candidates applied for the RPL process in the following categories – of these, there were 11 Scaffold Erectors, two Scaffold Supervisors, and one Scaffold Inspector.

<sup>88</sup> A full report on this pilot project is available and will be used for guidance in all future IWH Scaffold RPL initiatives.

Whereas the employees who engaged in this RPL process might have been competent in the basic tasks of erecting scaffolding, major gaps were observed in these Scaffolders' abilities to erect advanced types of scaffolding. The tasks associated with the supervision of a team of Scaffolders and inspecting scaffolding were also severely compromised. In these areas, the RPL candidates had to attend gap-fill training.

Only four of the 14 scaffolding erector RPL candidates in the pilot were found to be competent regarding the correct and safe application of the scaffolding erection, dismantling, stacking and storage, and working at height process – and were awarded the qualifications. Definite gaps were found in the experience and skills of one of the Scaffolding Supervisors as well as the Inspector. The employees who were found to be not yet competent, were referred to one of the IWH-recognised training providers for further gap-fill training; the intention is that they will be registered and licensed as soon as they are competent.

### **Additional challenges**

The current status of the Scaffold industry is still plagued with certificates which constitute the 'misrepresentation of qualifications' as many training providers are not yet accredited to train in Scaffold specialisations with the Construction SETA (CETA). Further, some of the providers are accredited by the CETA, but never upload their learner achievement results to the CETA database. In addition, many of the accredited providers are battling to receive Statements of Results from the CETA for their competent learners. Some individuals wait for up to, and over a year, for their Statements of Results.

The IWH needed to engage in other measures to support the industry in conducting proper training, as it remains desirable for people to achieve the qualifications before commencing the recognition process for their professional designations. The IWH has introduced interim arrangements for the employees who meet the specified criteria, so that they can enter/ continue in the workplace with some recognition, based on the IWH quality assurance measures.

The IWH has also introduced a licensing system to issue Statements of Results for Scaffolders on condition that: (1) the provider concerned is accredited with the CETA and can prove that they have uploaded the achievement data on the CETA database; (2) the IWH conducts its own quality assurance processes on the providers' training, venue, and training equipment, through further external moderation; and (3) the learners' results and the Internal Moderators' Report are uploaded to the IWH.

Whilst the RPL process is available, the industry is prioritising the training of Scaffold employees to ensure that all Scaffolders are competent against the basic Scaffold Erection Unit Standards. A linked priority is for the CETA to issue Statements of Results before continuing with the RPL process for professional designations.

## **RPL FOR ROPE ACCESS PRACTITIONERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The Rope Access industry has been represented as a Chamber within the IWH since its inception. The Rope Access and Fall Arrest Association (RAFAA) merged with the Specialist Access Engineering and Manufacturers Association (SAEMA) in 2008 to form the IWH.

For a period of almost 15 years, the Industrial Rope Access Trade Association (IRATA), a United Kingdom (UK)-based entity, dominated the training of Rope Access employees in South Africa. RAFAA was however involved in the development of NQF-linked Unit Standard training standards, which were benchmarked against the IRATA training standards. With the promulgation of the NQF Act and the new Construction Regulations of 2014 indicating that 'competence' should be against the NQF-registered qualifications, increasing numbers of IRATA-trained employees approached the IWH for recognition against the IWH's SAQA-registered designations for Rope Access. To retrain these very competent employees would have been unfair, so the IWH met with the Rope Access Community of Expert Practitioners, and decided on another

approach to recognise these employees for the purposes of obtaining the IWH's SAQA-registered designations.

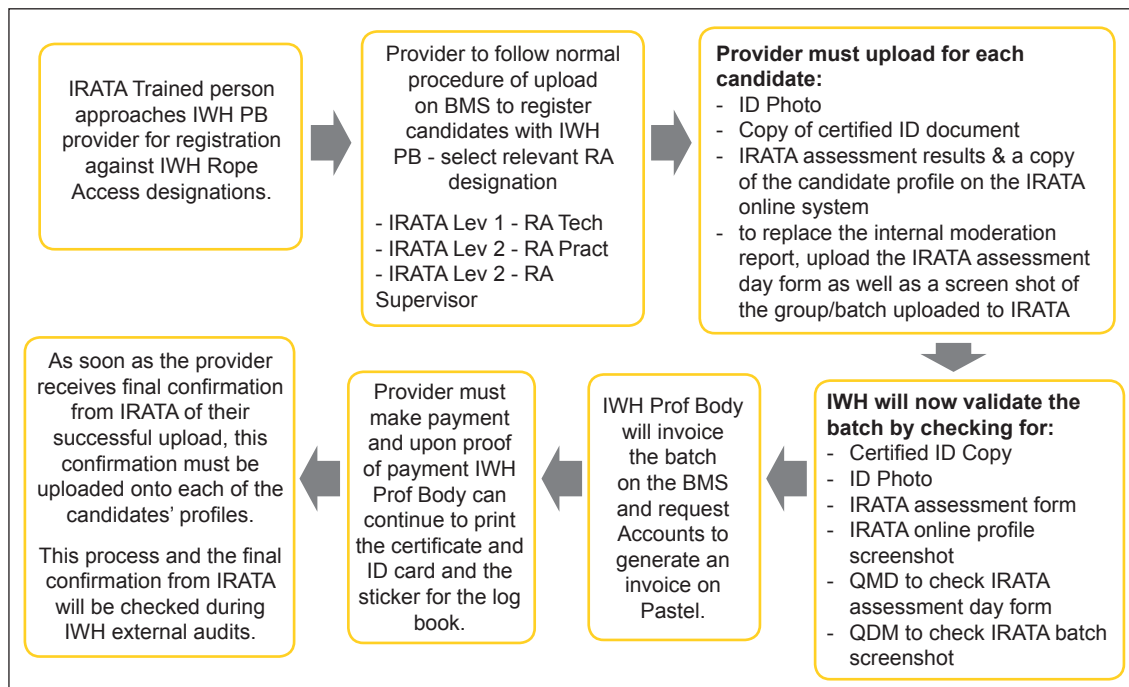
An alignment matrix was established, and an alignment exercise conducted. The matrix took into account the outcomes of the IRATA training and the South African NQF Unit Standards. As the Unit Standards had been developed on the basis of the IRATA training standards, the qualifications were found to be aligned in most cases. The outcomes for Fall Arrest techniques were an exception: these appeared to be absent in the IRATA curriculum. During one of the IWH Rope Access Chamber meetings with member companies, it was established that these outcomes were acquired by the IRATA-trained technicians in the workplace experience component. It was therefore not necessary to send these employees for gap-fill training. It became clear that it was possible for the IWH to register the IRATA-trained employees against the IWH Rope Access designations, subject to the following conditions:

- the persons' IRATA registration was still valid and current;
- the person adhered to the IWH Code of Ethics; and
- the person approached an IWH-recognised training provider to assist in the 'conversion' of the IRATA 'qualification' for the purposes of registration against the IWH's equivalent designations, and for licensing purposes.

It was agreed that the registration with the IWH would not be longer than the period of registration with IRATA. Each individual could then decide with whom they would like to be re-assessed. This RPL initiative enabled a high number of employers to avoid making their employees redo their training and incur unnecessary expenses in the process.

## **RPL FOR FALL PROTECTION PLANNERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Any company with employees who work at height needs to have a Fall Protection Plan that is developed by a competent Fall Protection Planner.



**Figure 5: The IWH process flow for the registration of IRATA-trained and registered Rope Access practitioners against the IWH designations**

Key:

IRATA=Industrial Rope Access Trade Association

BMS=Business Management System

RA=Rope Access

ID=Identity Document

QDM=Quality Development Manager

The designation for Fall Protection Planners was registered with SAQA in 2012. Initially, the IWH only allowed persons competent against the relevant Unit Standards as underlying qualifications, to register for this designation. It soon became clear that this was an activity performed by some Health and Safety Officers who were also registered as professionals with their respective professional bodies.

Most training providers are still not engaging in RPL against qualifications for Fall Protection, for differing reasons. The IWH worked with its respective Community of Expert Practitioners to design an RPL process and assessment instruments, as well as the criteria to qualify for this RPL, to fast track the registration of potential Fall Protection Planners.

Initially, some discussion and agreement were needed between the IWH and some of the Safety Officers involved, as well as the Fall Protection Planner Community of Expert Practitioners. After this process, agreement was reached regarding the RPL criteria needed.

### **Criteria for the RPL process, and the process itself**

The criteria for approval for assessment in the RPL process are that applicants submit a 'Dossier of Competence', which must include:

- a *Curriculum Vitae* and/or letter from the employer that states the persons' appointment as a Fall Protection Planner as well as the period of employment and/or developing Fall Protection Plans;
- proof of the following:
  - i. registration with the South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP); the South African Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (SAIOSH); the Institute of Service Management (IOSM); or the Integrated Occupational Health Services; and/or
  - ii. any relevant qualifications such as in the Engineering, Occupational Health and Safety, or similar fields; and/or
  - iii. employment in the Occupational Health and Safety field for a minimum of 12 months; and
- any relevant in-house or training certificates; and
- certified copy of an Identity Document; and
- a one-page essay on experience held as a Fall Protection Planner.

The candidate might have to attend a preparation session with the recognised training provider and/or assessor – at the recognised provider's training centre, telephonically or via Skype, as determined by the relevant training provider. This session includes an explanation of the RPL process, assessment criteria, and

other requirements.

### **Developments following agreement around the RPL process and criteria**

If the criteria listed above were met, the RPL application could commence. Those who met the criteria could submit the evidence of compliance with items in the list, including the most recent Fall Protection Plan, developed by the candidates themselves, for assessment by a registered, Constituent Assessor<sup>89</sup>.

During the first pilot, it became evident that assessors would need in-depth engagements with potential Fall Protection Planners, to ensure and acquire evidence that the Plan submitted was truly developed by the individual applicant concerned. Engagement was also required to guide the applicant in terms of all the criteria needed for a good Fall Protection Plan.

What emerged during the RPL processes was not that the Safety Officers were failing to meet the criteria or lacking in the competences to develop these Plans. Rather, the RPL process affirmed that all Fall Protection Planners in South Africa urgently needed to be part of a process of Continuing Professional Development (CPD). This reality became clear when the assessors became aware of the gaps in those trained, as well as the RPL-assessed Fall Protection Planners.

The IWH is continuing with this project and in the process, is increasing the numbers of Fall Protection Planners registered with it. These employees are now part of a CPD process.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

It is possible that readers of this paper might think the IWH 'confused' between the notions of qualification, competences, and 'license to practice' (a professional

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<sup>89</sup> A Constituent Assessor is competent regarding Unit Standard 11575: Conduct Outcomes-Based Assessments, as well as being competent regarding the qualifications/ Unit Standards the person will be assessed against.

designation). The aim of the IWH's encouragement of all of these aspects is to assist the Work-at-Height industry to continue its work as safely and competently as possible.

In the absence of the necessary qualifications, the IWH had to be both innovative in its work, while remaining compliant with the national policies for professional bodies.

The Work-at-Height-related skills and qualifications are practically rather than theoretically oriented. RPL for a professional designation thus needs to focus on the tasks at hand when practicing the occupation. This practice means that RPL for professional designations in the IWH context has something in common with RPL towards a qualification.

It is clear that the processes towards professional status or the 'license to practice' could be implemented for a range of types of work and positions. It is also clear that RPL should be conducted on a far larger scale than is currently being implemented. The IWH believes that RPL against the Work-at-Height-related skills and qualifications might benefit most candidates more than would RPL against a designation, as it opens up opportunities for credit accumulation and learning-and-work pathways (articulation). The IWH with its Communities of Expert Practitioners is in a good position to assist the SETAs delegated quality assurance responsibilities by the QCTO, and their providers, with the implementation of such RPL activities. Further relationship-building and joint work are needed to enable this collaboration.

Currently, the IWH continues to find ways to recognise the skills and experience of Work-at-Height practitioners in the industry, to ensure that the workforce is upskilled regarding the competences needed, and receives the recognition due to it.

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<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that the Department of Labour (DoL) had a name change and is now called the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL)

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# PAPER 7



# Implementing Quality and Compliant Work Integrated Learning (WIL) Strategies within an Accredited Learning Context

*Ms Lize Moldenhauer, Ms Cindy Londt and Ms Dorothy Fernandez*

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## ABSTRACT

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is needed in both the further education and training and Higher Education contexts. There is a need for education and training institutions to ensure compliance with quality assurance in the implementation of WIL, to ensure that quality assurance audits, the validation of assessment results, and the awarding of credits, are meaningful. There is a lack of research on quality assurance and WIL. This paper analyses how quality assurance, WIL and gainful employment are interlinked in compliance-based accredited learning. WIL is often considered to be tedious and challenging to implement, as education and training institutions source the various opportunities for learner placements. There exists a general perception that there are growing discrepancies between graduate attributes and the skills required within the workforce. Often, under-skilled graduates are not able to meet employer demands. WIL aims to address these concerns by incorporating theory and practice into education, to produce more work-ready graduates. Truman *et al* (2017) offer insights in this regard, and recommend that tertiary institutions utilise sound models when introducing WIL into learning. With this knowledge, and by utilising the Model for Workplace Readiness, this paper focuses on the implementation of education strategies that are both of quality, and are compliant within an environment that is accredited for WIL. Through meaningful engagement with all of the stakeholders involved, and in ensuring a model that includes workplace-based coaching and learner support, a partnership between the educational institution, the workplace and the learner, is created.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is linked with quality assurance to ensure the efficacy of the programme, and compliance with the national standards designed to ensure the delivery of quality learning. As le Grange (2014a:27) noted, “quality assurance is cyclical and allows or creates the opportunity for continuous review, and can be a full 360-degree opportunity for all role players in the system”.

Although WIL is a component of the delivery of occupation-related qualifications in South Africa, the providers linked to quality assurance bodies such as the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) often have relatively limited engagements with workplaces<sup>91</sup>. Roles such as workplace coaches/ evidence collection facilitators have seldom been introduced (le Grange, 2014b).

The providers of occupation-related qualifications require investment in the workplace components of learning. Addressing the challenges to creating relationships and ensuring workplace-based learner support and guidance, are critical for ensuring learner success. External quality assurance audits can address these aspects. This paper presents a model for the necessary engagement with learners, workplaces, and quality assurance – three key determinants of successful WIL implementation.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

WIL has been identified as an integral component of learning that enables students to develop under supervision, the skills and competences that enable them to be competitive in the workplace (Bosco and Ferns, 2014). The model presented in this paper grew out of a larger project. The summary that follows was drawn from the literature review for this research. The literature review aimed to identify the theory and conceptualisation of WIL; WIL frameworks; how

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<sup>91</sup> The SETAs have continued this role although a new body, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), exists.

WIL is implemented in the South African context; and the various impacts of WIL on education and training.

### ***Work Integrated Learning: Theory, concept, framework***

Brink (2015:2) explains that WIL is a process that implements the engagement of curriculum and industry players, where the integration of knowledge and skills is accomplished through interaction in authentic situations similar to, and reflective of, those found in workplaces. Moreover, WIL focuses on including a host employer organisation and structured training in the academic realm, in order to develop competences and skills, and to cultivate knowledge through the mentoring that is incorporated within the curriculum (Brink, 2015; Smith, 2012). WIL is thus a partnership between three stakeholders: the student, the host employer, and the institution of learning (Dwesini, 2017; Truman *et al* 2017). Here an individual learns through actively working (Sewell, 2015). WIL is designed to take into account the needs of society, both present and future, and engages industry within communities of practice, to create employable graduates (Smith, 2012).

### ***WIL in South Africa***

Truman *et al* (2017) state that there are policies and other tools in South Africa, such as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET), that promote WIL and encourage Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to build ties with industry in order to give students opportunities for work placements after graduation. Further, as Truman *et al* (*Ibid.*) indicate, the National Development Plan (NDP) (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2011) emphasises that tertiary institutions must develop student skills in line with what is needed in the workforce in the country. In reality, the implementing organisations are un- or under-funded for this work, and there is WIL for small percentages of students only.

In South Africa, WIL is part of the curriculum in some Higher Education qualifications. Sewell (2015) points to the example of certain institutions allowing student teachers to teach from their first year studies onwards. On the other

hand, there are criticisms that there is limited exposure to WIL, due to a lack of engagement (Barends and Nel, 2017). Students are not able to engage meaningfully because there is no critical reflection expected, and no evaluations that enable growth and learning, because they are merely exposed to situations (Sewell, 2015).

Dwesini (2017) reports on students from a South African university who completed a WIL programme in 2015. These students obtained feedback in relation to various WIL criteria, and many reported having gained self-confidence, communication skills, and experience in teamwork, professionalism, time management, organisational skills, and computer skills. However, some participants felt that some of their skills were not developed because they were not exposed to situations where these skills were required. For example, those who were not exposed to teamwork in their placements, had not acquired teamwork skills (*Ibid.*).

### ***Implementing WIL in university degrees***

Implementing WIL in university degrees needs to begin at the 'foundation' of the degree. MacDonald *et al* (2014) for example, indicate that professional degrees should be designed to incorporate WIL in their programmes. Forbes (2006) supports this idea, proposing that programme curricula need to be designed to incorporate components essential to WIL.

Furthermore, Rook (2017) indicates that implementing WIL is taxing on resources. As such, identifying and sourcing the requirements for WIL are an essential part of implementing WIL. WIL extends past the university; it is incumbent on the government, industry, and other stakeholders to implement it together. The commitment from all of these stakeholders is necessary for WIL to be successful. Implementing WIL requires the integration of theory and practice (Freudenberg *et al* 2011); partnerships are key to achieve this integration.

## ***Enablers, positive aspects, and challenges regarding WIL***

WIL enables students to learn and develop within environments that offer exposure to industry, and move against learning in vacuums with theoretical inputs alone. Its positive impact is that students are enabled to link theoretical knowledge with practical applications in controlled environments, under supervision. This enables the students to develop other abilities beyond the expectations of the university or organisation (MacDonald *et al* 2014). However, the positive implications of WIL do not only benefit the students. Truman *et al* (2017) indicate for instance, that when students are incorporated into industry placements, they bring new ideas and innovations to the workplace.

The challenges include that there are additional expectations for people internally in the universities, and outside the institutions of learning, in the companies. Roles need to be clearly defined, work-and-learning expectations need to be realistic, and employers need to understand that the students are with them for their learning environments, rather than being there to perform to the company's standards or expectations (Truman *et al* 2017). Moreover, as Reddan and Rauchle (2017) state, there is limited information on the effectiveness of WIL in practice. MacDonald *et al* (2014) further indicate that self-reporting from participants is not a valid or reliable indicator of the success of WIL. Strategies to combat these challenges include implementing effective supervision, and developing appropriate methods for gathering valid and reliable WIL data.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research on which paper draws is ongoing; it was first explored in Moldenhauer, Londt, and le Grange (2017), in an article entitled, 'Academic leadership challenges – ensuring relevance in the Work Integrated Learning space'. Conceptually, the project explored leadership, but there was an opportunity to explore through the research, WIL and quality assurance.

Data explored for the initial research were used to develop a conceptual model for the implementation of the project. The project followed a case study approach, as this could be implemented nationally, and involve multiple phases.

The initial phase of the research included a literature survey to consider current WIL theory, models, and examples of practice nationally and internationally. Findings from the research were then considered to inform the selection of the most appropriate opportunity to evaluate a quality assurance-focused workplace-based learning model.

Following these steps, qualitative research was conducted using small focus groups of stakeholders from the entities involved, including the project management team of a large private educational institution with a national footprint. A grounded theory approach was followed, and combined with inductive analysis.

The qualitative research focused on current, future and perceived settings for workplace-based learning; understanding the meanings and perspectives linked to this learning; and understanding processes. The standard methods of case study research were applied, including observations, interviews, and documentary analysis. Steps were taken to ensure the validity and the ethics of the research and evaluation, which included industry experts from the organisation where the project was initiated.

A range of inputs was solicited from key experts; due to the nature of the research problem and key outcomes indicated, a limited range of expert participants were able to provide the bulk of the relevant high-level inputs.

All participation in the research was voluntary. Participants were advised both verbally and in writing, that their informed consent to participate was required and that anyone was free to withdraw from the project. Confidentiality and anonymity were offered to all participants, and were maintained through the use of a coded database. However, due to the nature and purpose of the research, as well as the methodology followed, most participants did not take up this option.

The findings were documented according to the model used by the organisation, which focused on:

- learner engagement;
- workplace engagement; and
- quality assurance engagement.

## **CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

The Retail Readiness Programme (RRP) developed for one of the largest retailers in South Africa followed a methodology that linked workplace-based learning facilitation with coaching and learner support in the workplace, to encourage the embedding of knowledge, and to evaluate it using the practical outcomes demonstrated by the learners.

The model used took into account a shift from 'Retail employment', a more passive act, to 'entrepreneurial Retail readiness' – the provision of skills in a way that is cognisant of the Retail industry as being entrepreneurial. The skills and Retail readiness provide opportunities for potential staff to understand the skills requirements of the Retail sector, and more importantly, to understand and explore the possibilities of entrepreneurship in the sector, beyond the entry-level position offered. This approach directly shares the understanding of Retail leadership, and the values and requirements thereof – through the completion of a skills programme on 'starting your own business', the role that a business must meet in terms of succession planning, and the key requirements needed to ensure the sustainability of a business.

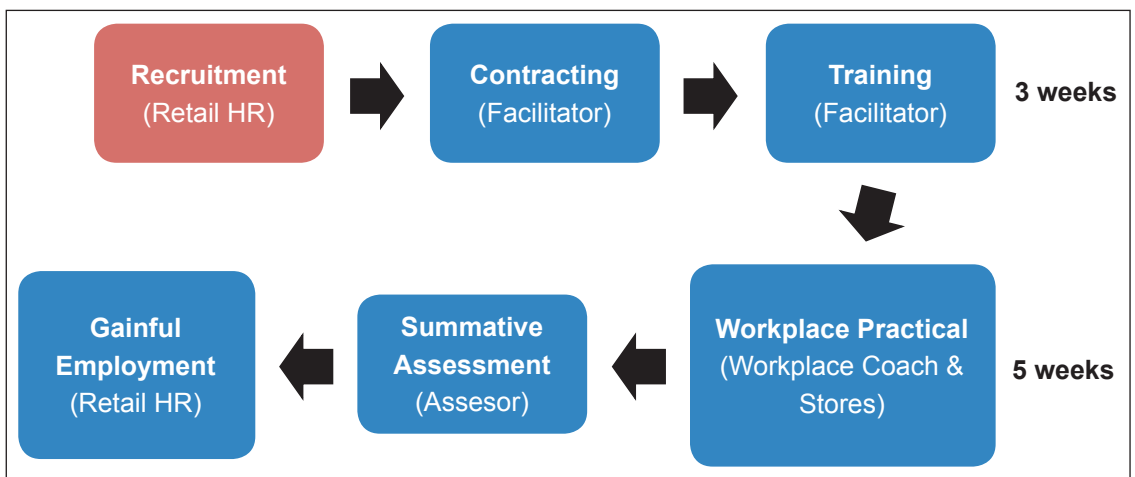
The eight-week RRP learning programme resulted in learners having an opportunity to understand the requirements of the Retail sector, in a way that was linked to the learning outcomes of the work-based learning. The methodology of the programme was developed based on adult learning needs in the workplace. Kenner and Weinerman (2011) have conducted research on the efficacy of the programme, through the ongoing evaluation of its effectiveness in a longitudinal study summarised below.

The model which included a focus on the employability of learners in the sector, sought to ensure a transition from a situation where there was a significant staff turnover – a pattern which plagues the sector – to a focus on ‘how many days people stayed employed’, based on the data available. The research included contrasting direct employment with employment through the RRP. Unemployed people became potential new buyers through low-income access that was linked to movements towards, and in, the workplace. For those who wished to start a business and succeed in it, the Retail readiness of one’s own company was understood as being the basis for working for others, to ensure that stakeholder participation was the benchmark for succession planning.

This research considered both the data from stores linked to the employability of learners in the Retail RRP, and the feedback provided by store managers about their feelings on hiring learners from the Retail RRP.

### ***Learner Engagement Model: WIL***

In an attempt to make the model accessible, it has been documented through a visual process (Moldenhauer, Londt and Le Grange, 2017). Figure 1 shows the Learner Engagement Model for WIL.



**Figure 1: Diagram of the Learner Engagement Model for WIL Recruitment**

A formal recruitment process is undertaken, where the Retail Human Resources Management engages with potential staff members, explains and conducts the formal recruitment process, and helps to share an understanding of what the requirements are to be considered as being employable within the sector. It is important to note that recruitment is offered as part of the learning programme, and is not guaranteed afterwards. Part of the programme is what provides the formal offer of work, if the learner demonstrates readiness as well as the desire to be employed.

### **Contracting**

Learners undergo formal contracting for their learning, which is a requirement for the formal awarding of credits that are recorded in the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). Learners also receive an explanation of the formal requirements that are followed in WIL programmes. Learners exiting schools, or those who have not been able to find gainful employment, have not necessarily had opportunities to understand what the legal requirements are, and the contracting process followed, for credit-bearing learning.

### **Training**

Learners go through a formal training programme, which is linked explicitly to two Unit Standards registered on the NQF as a Skills Programme: Operating a Small Business in a Retail Environment:

- Unit Standard 258155: Explain the Factors that Impact on the Bottom Line of a Wholesale and Retail Unit (10 Credits = 100 notional Hours).
- Unit Standard 243809: Run a Small Business (12 credits = 120 notional hours).

The training intervention is over a three-week period.

## **Practical**

The practical work is also referred to as ‘experiential learning’ and ‘Work Integrated Learning’ (WIL). Learners are placed at various sites across South Africa, and into various departments over a five-week period. During this time, they are allocated a coach who helps them to focus on, and understand, the workplace, and to complete the evidence collection for their summative assessments which are due at the end of the five weeks.

## **Summative assessment**

Learners are assessed through their submissions of Portfolios of Evidence, during which they have had to consider a viable business plan, should they wish to pursue their new venture.

## **Opportunity for gainful employment**

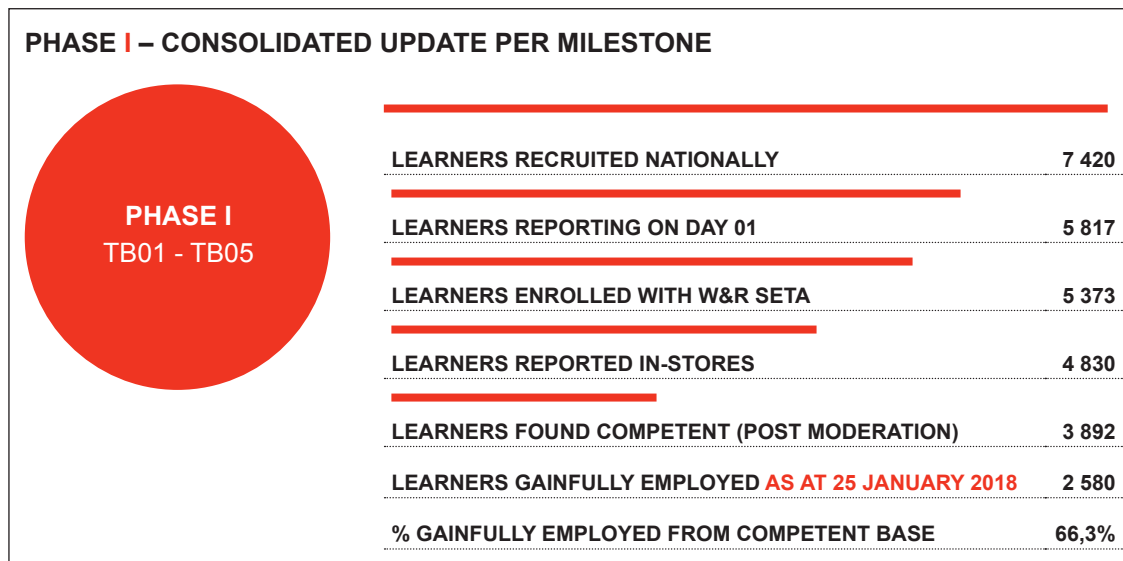
Learners apply for the opportunity of gainful employment, should they want to be considered. However, the learners also need to have developed a business plan/case for consideration. The gainful employment process comprises entrepreneurship; it is two-fold – it is an opportunity to start and understand one’s own business, and an opportunity to pursue gainful employment within the Retail sector.

## **Evaluation and review**

The organisation was able to evaluate the efficacy of the model, and to review the staff members who were offered gainful employment.

## ***Initiative for gainful employment***

Three phases of this initiative were implemented. Phase 1, which was a pilot phase, comprised learner recruitment, reporting for the initiative, enrolment with the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA), reporting for work in the stores, assessment, and accessing gainful employment (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Diagram showing Phase 1: Consolidated update per milestone in the Learner Engagement Model for WIL**

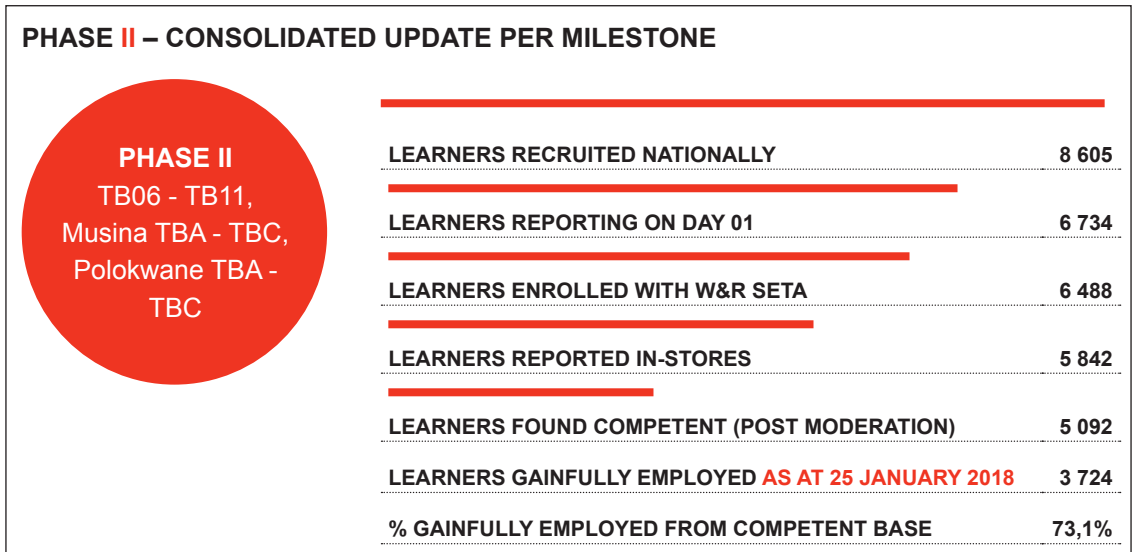
Key:

TB=Training Block<sup>92</sup>

Phase 1 included ‘five initiations’ in the project. The recruitment numbers reflected the ranking of the Retail sector: 7420 candidates went through the formal application, selection and confirmation of participation in this opportunity for gainful employment. However, only 5817 (78,4%) of the recruited learners arrived in the classroom on the first day, while 1603 (21,6%) did not report – it may be that other opportunities or choices were available for them. From the learners reporting on Day 1, only 464 (0,06%) enrolled formally with the W&R SETA; 72,43% of the enrolled learners successfully completed the learning programme with the W&R SETA, and 66,3% were gainfully employed.

Phase 2 comprised ongoing work that has resulted in a drop in employment-based costs. Data showing the gainful employment from Phase 1 helped to initiate it. Figure 3 shows the consolidated update per milestone.

<sup>92</sup> TB=Training Block, comprising three weeks of formal training plus five weeks of in-store practical work. In Phase 1, five TBs were conducted in two of South Africa’s provinces. In Phase 2, TBA-C were RPP training for unemployed youth, in preparation for employment in new stores in a third province in the country



**Figure 3: Consolidated update per milestone in the gainful employment initiative**  
Key:

TB=Training Block; TBA=Training Block A; TBB=Training Block B; TBC=Training Blocks C

Phase 2 included ‘six initiations’ of the project. Recruitment numbers still reflected the ranking of the Retail sector; the number of candidates who went through the formal application, selection and confirmation of participation was 8605 in total. However, only 6734 (78,26) arrived in the classroom on the first day while 1871 (21,74%) did not report – these being similar percentages to those in Phase 1. The numbers – 246 (0,02%) – reflected in the timelines showed that the percentage of learners formally enrolled with the W&R SETA was smaller than that in Phase 1. However, an increased percentage (96,64%) of learners successfully completed the SETA learning programme. Further, 73,13% of learners were gainfully employed at the end of Phase 2, demonstrating their Retail readiness.

### **Client Engagement Model: WIL**

In order to determine the efficacy of the RRP from a store perspective, the Retail Store Managers from 39 participating stores were asked to complete a survey on the programme, which included evaluating the learners as effective employees. Eighty-five percent (85%) of these respondents felt that the learners had added

value to their stores; 10% said that the learners provided basic services; and 5% said that they had brought limited value. Respondents had an opportunity in the survey, to select 'the learners added no value', but none selected this option.

For the survey questions that linked the learning programme to a customer service engagement and responsibility perspective, 97% of respondents felt that the RRP was in line with the store requirements for dealing with customers and staff, while 3% said that it was not. The fact that the learners had completed their in-store training through the coaching programme, is thought to have helped to evaluate the effectiveness of their Retail readiness in the five weeks of the in-store phase of the programme.

In addition, the level of commitment to dealing with store goals was evaluated. Seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents noted that the learners from the RRP had committed to making a difference; just under 21% felt that the learners showed basic commitment, and 8% noted limited commitment. There was an option in the survey for 'no learner commitment', but no respondents selected this. These responses suggest that the coaching aspect of the programme, which evaluated commitment to a project, may have been effective.

All of the respondents (100%) said that the RRP learners' positive attitudes had made meaningful differences to their stores. The development of such attitudes had been part of the programme. Furthermore, 97% of the respondents said that they would use RRP learners to fill vacancies in their stores; 3% said they would not. These responses suggest the efficacy of the programme, with its values, and its focus on understanding store-based systems, best practices and standard operating procedures.

### ***Quality Assurance Model: WIL***

There is a robust quality assurance system for education and training in South Africa. Providers of education and training must be accredited with one of three Quality Councils, to offer qualifications and/or the programmes for qualifications. In addition, private providers must be registered with the Department of Higher

Education and Training. Through these systems, the content of qualifications and its provision are monitored and moderated.

In order to run the RRP programme, its content, formative and summative assessments, assessment guides, facilitator guides and alignment matrices, were submitted to the relevant SETA for evaluation. This process included the approval of the learning programme and skilled facilitators, assessors and moderators. External moderation was conducted for Phases 1 and 2 of the programme. Robust assessment practices were followed, and the learners' results were approved for uploading to the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD).

In addition to the various other components of quality assurance, the focus on data and the recording of data were key. The educational institution involved noted challenges in the data, and data audits were conducted at various points in the project. Any discrepancies found were corrected accordingly. In order to achieve this data accuracy, a third-party data manager was used.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CASE STUDY**

An evaluation of a learning programme based on learner achievements is not sufficient, as it neither considers the delivery model used, nor does it include the engagements between the various key role-players in the process. It is suggested that the following recommendations form the basis of evaluations for the learner engagement model for implementing WIL; ensure that:

- the quality assurance covers both the theoretical and practical components of learning, especially in the case of the WIL components;
- all role-players involved understand and support the model to be used, as well as their roles and responsibilities, so that they engage fully;
- the WIL component has sufficient learner support and guidance, and that these aspects are documented and form part of the assessment processes; and
- WIL is fully quality assured, where there is internal and external monitoring and evaluation.

## CONCLUSION

The research reported in this paper presented the data for an example of an application-based programme based on learning theory that impacted positively for the learners and workplaces involved. The RRP was linked to effective coaching and learner support in the workplace, which companies do not have time to provide on their own, but which clearly resulted in higher employment rates than would otherwise have been the case. The initiative was encouraging as it supported both the business and the employability of the learners. It created learning and work opportunities, and responsibility, through its entrepreneurship methodology, even when the learners were not starting their own businesses.

It is thought that the fact that the programme was credit-based encouraged learners to participate; they could gain credits that were uploaded into the NLRD. While the initiative used Unit Standards, its principles apply for the new Occupational Qualifications of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).

Quality assurance and WIL are interconnected. Without the delivery of quality learning, learner support and guidance, and robust assessment, the programme in the reported initiative would not have been successful. Importantly, the relationships between the workplace and partners need to be in place for the collaborative work required. The various levels of quality assurance need to be shared through information sessions. For the successful implementation of WIL, all of the stakeholders involved need to see its value. Learners need to have authentic workplace-based experiences, and meet the skills needs of the workplaces. The quality criteria of the quality assurance bodies must be met.

The findings of this research have been shared in two academic conferences to date. The methodology has been published as a good practice model for workplace readiness programmes (Moldenhauer, Fernandez and Le Grange, 2017). The initiative is supported by ongoing research in the form of Phase 3 of the project, which seeks further to evaluate the efficacy of the programme.

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# PAPER 8



## **Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL): A System Re-set Success Story**

*Dr Florus Prinsloo*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the artisan space has a long history in South Africa, and has always been an integral part of artisan-related training legislation – especially of the apprenticeship training system. However, as the country entered into democracy from the early 1990's onwards, and new, modern skills development legislation was developed and implemented, it became apparent and necessary also to review and revise the artisan RPL systems and processes. As this work unfolded, it also became clear that the new model must be based on actual competences, rather than on reported competences through what were known as 'letters of service'. This shift resulted in the development of 'toolkits' that described the competences and the related evidence needed for RPL. The new model that emerged and is being implemented increasingly across numerous artisanal trades, also considers the numeracy and literacy levels relevant for the nature of the work. These developments seek to remove the glass ceilings created by the need for academic qualifications in order to enter into RPL processes. The new model has gained policy level status as it was published formally via Government Gazette, and is linked to the current Occupational Qualifications of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).

### **INTRODUCTION**

This paper describes the background to the Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL) system in South Africa. The paper outlines the emergence of the new model and system created as part of the modern skills development regime in the country, as well as the newly emerging Artisan Development Strategy (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2008: Section 26A[2]).

In South Africa, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is defined in its simplest form as the formal recognition of the competences of a person, through controlled processes, against formal qualifications. Such competences are developed by people working over periods of time. RPL has been, and continues to be, a common practice in the artisan community, for trade occupations such as Welder, Carpenter, Chef, Hairdresser, and others<sup>93</sup>.

The definition of an artisan is subjective at the best of times, and the word 'artisan' is often used interchangeably with 'tradesman' or 'trades worker'. At present in South Africa, the officially legislated definitions of 'artisan' and 'trade' are found in the Skills Development Amendment Act No. 37 of 2008 (RSA, 2008) as follows.

- An artisan is, "a person who has been certified as competent to perform a listed trade in accordance with this Act" (*Op.Cit.*: Clause 1[a]).
- A trade is, "an occupation for which an artisan qualification is required in terms of Section 26B" (*Op.Cit.*: Clause 1[i]).

A broader, more technically descriptive definition of an artisan is found in the document 'Listing of Occupations as Trades for which Artisan Qualifications are Required' (RSA, 2012). In these occupations, a qualified person applies a high level of practical skills supported and re-enforced by the underpinning and applied knowledge, to:

- manufacture, produce, service, install or maintain tangible goods, products or equipment in a technical work environment;
- use tools and equipment to perform his/her duties;
- measure and conduct fault-finding on technical machinery and equipment to apply corrective or repair actions; and
- apply and adhere to all relevant health, safety and environmental legislation.

This person would have achieved a learning period equivalent to three or more years of accumulated knowledge, practical experience, and workplace learning.

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<sup>93</sup> The full list of artisanal occupations can be found in Government Gazette No. 35625, of 31 August 2012 (Pretoria: Department of Higher Education and Training).

The need for such ‘technically skilled people’ is a given in any economy in the world, and South Africa is no exception. As a result, in a range of national strategies such as the New Growth Path National Skills Accord (Economic Development Department [EDD], 2011), the Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS) (Department of Education-Department of Labour (DoE-DoL, 2010), and the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) III (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2011), the need for artisans is elevated and identified as a priority area. Often the strategies that these documents contain are linked to the well-known and often-quoted reference in the National Development Plan (NDP) to – and the country goal of – producing 30,000 qualified artisans per year by 2030.

The need for a systemic approach to artisan development has also been emphasised in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (DHET, 2013:xvi), which notes that,

“In areas of work such as the artisan trades, apprenticeships have traditionally been the pathway to qualifications; however, the apprenticeship system has been allowed to deteriorate since the mid-1980s, resulting in a shortage of mid-level skills in the engineering and construction fields. Re-establishing a good artisan training system is an urgent priority; the current target is for the country to produce 30 000 artisans a year by 2030”

The White Paper for PSET clearly makes a direct link to the NDP. Artisan development is a major focus for South Africa. However, due to decades of the *apartheid*-based learning-and-work process in the country<sup>94</sup>, artisan development was only available to a minority of citizens through formalised training. This did not deter people from learning and, as a result, today South Africa has many people who have developed artisanal skills simply by doing – after an entirely self-taught process.

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<sup>94</sup> This reference is to the pre-democracy race-based system in the country.

RPL allows such self-taught persons to enter the formal processes to become certificated for their artisanal skills. In a national context, this is a critical component of the broader artisan development strategy, as these people, once certificated, can become mentors for apprentices. There is currently a great lack of certificated mentors in the country. People who enter the formal system 'through an RPL route' often have considerable work experience, making them ideal mentors for the younger apprentices. Such a process allows for the new system to be rigorously tested and expanded to include RPL in increasing numbers of artisanal occupations.

This paper attempts to sketch developments in the new system, in which many people have been 'ARPL'ed' – and received recognition for their skills.

## **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The national artisan development system in democratic South Africa, which includes ARPL, effectively started when the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) was launched on 27 March 2006 by the then-Deputy President. JIPSA sought, *inter alia*, to prioritise key skills and adopt appropriate Human Resource Development strategies to address these skills in the short- to medium term.

The JIPSA process identified artisanal skills as a key area for development, leading to significant changes in the legislative framework for artisan development. These changes are exemplified by Chapter 6A – Artisan Development – in the Skills Development Amendment Act (RSA, 2008). However, the actual system-rebuilding process was only operationalised when the then-Minister of Higher Education and Training established the National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB) on 30 November 2010, "to coordinate artisan development in the Republic" (*Ibid.*:26A(1)[b]). The rebuilding process included the ARPL system.

In February 2012, the DHET commissioned the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to lead a research consortium to support its capacity to

create and maintain a labour market information system through the Labour Market Intelligence Project (LMIP). The LMIP is a centrally coordinated mechanism through which the national government in collaboration with the various sectors of the South African economy determine the skills needed in the country on an ongoing basis. The LMIP includes data collection from all employers in the country, through the Sector Education Training Authorities (SETAs). Through various analytical processes, it develops and publishes what is known as the 'List of Occupations in High Demand' (OHD) in South Africa. This OHD list influences the funding of artisan development, as well as the work permits for foreign nationals seeking work in the country.

One of the LMIP projects was entitled, 'Understanding Changing Artisanal Occupational Milieus and Identities'. This project led to a report (Mbatha *et al* 2014) entitled, 'Towards Understanding the Distinctive Nature of Artisan Training: Implications for Skills Planning in South Africa'. Under the subheading, 'A negative historical discourse on vocational education and training', the report (*Ibid.*:26) states,

"The outline of major historical developments in technical and vocational education and training explains why our artisan skilling and labour market systems reflect specific racial, sectoral, occupational and skills level characteristics. While causalities and the chronology of key events will surely be contested in any historical account, this discussion highlights the fact that the history of artisan development in the country is deeply embedded in the needs of the labour market, political imperatives and societal pressures [at] particular points in time. Furthermore, it is clear that the interplay between various parts of these systems at different points in the historical trajectory has had profound implications for the success or failure of political, social and economic objectives. The message for policy is clear – the success of a future artisan system in the country must acknowledge and take into consideration the complexity and power of the historical processes and associated discourses underlying systems of vocational education and training in the country over time"

Clearly, in revising the artisan system and including ARPL in South Africa, an iterative process was needed that considered each step forward, with current and past historical processes in mind, learning from what worked and what did not work, what could be re-introduced, and what not to re-introduce. This iterative principle has been used frequently in the development of ARPL in the country.

During the early 1980s, reforms in apprenticeship development led to the Manpower Training Act (RSA, 1981), which for the first time gave Black workers opportunities to enter into apprenticeships. This system was restructured into what was termed the Competency-Based Modular Training (CMBT) that remains the backbone of artisan development in South Africa. The Manpower Training Act also introduced National Training Boards to control apprenticeship and ARPL development within specific industries. This was the first formally legislated ARPL system in South Africa: it is 35 years old.

Section 28 of the Manpower Training Act states, *inter alia*, that

“... any other person who has not passed a [T]rade [T]est ... but who satisfies the Training Board that he has ... gained experience in the trade in question, of a nature, and for a period which reasonably concurs with the conditions of apprenticeship for the trade in question, and in the opinion of the Training Board is adequate, and on payment by such person of the prescribed fee, admit him to a [T]rade [T]est in accordance with the said standards”

Since that time, Section 28 as quoted has afforded many people in South Africa access to the national trade-tests – and many have been certificated as qualified artisans. Regrettably, Section 28 is also widely perceived as being linked to ‘a lower class of artisans’, because these individuals did not receive the formal structured learning within an apprenticeship or learnership programme. These individuals did not receive what the Manpower Training Act (RSA, 1981: Section 13) refers to as the Section 13 Certificates.

From 1994, a series of policies that formed the foundation of the new democratic South Africa was legislated. The Skills Development Act (RSA, 1998) was the most significant for artisan development, including ARPL. The year 2008 was a watershed moment for artisan development and ARPL with the promulgation of the Skills Development Amendment Act (RSA, 2008), which included the new 'Chapter 6A', for artisan development, and the national coordination of artisan development in the country, through the NAMB. The Skills Development Amendment Act also established a centralised quality assurance mechanism for artisan development, the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). In 2009, the DHET was established by the President, and artisan development was transferred to it, from the Department of Labour<sup>95</sup>. The then-Minister of Higher Education and Training moved ahead quickly to establish the QCTO in February 2010, and NAMB in November 2010.

## **HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL (HRDC) PROCESS**

To continue the work initiated under JIPSA, the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) was launched in March 2010, as an advisory body to South Africa's then Deputy President. The role of the HRDC is, *inter alia*, to identify skills blockages and recommend solutions to address these barriers. The HRDC has made a significant impact on the work and success of the national artisan system rebuilding process, including ARPL, through the HRDC Artisan Development Technical Task Team (ADTTT).

A blockage identified by the HRDC (2013:23) was the lack of an ARPL system that focused on supporting the people seeking to transition from working as support workers in the Engineering field, to becoming certificated artisans. The HRDC Task Team felt that, although RPL had been available since the early 1980s, there had not been enough of a focus or effort in the Engineering field.

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<sup>95</sup> Currently the Department of Employment and Labour (DEL).

To address this challenge, the Chief Directorate: National Artisan Development that includes NAMB, initiated an ARPL pilot project in 2012, which became the basis for the implementation of a single national ARPL system. The ARPL pilot project was overseen by a Project Steering Committee comprising representatives from DHET, Organised Business and Organised Labour, working closely with the ADTTT. The pilot targeted the ARPL of 2000 persons across the country. Table 1 shows some statistics from the close-out report of the pilot (DHET-Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment Skills, and Labour Assessments [INDLELA], 2019).

**Table 1: ARPL Pilot Project information (Source: DHET-INDLELA, 2019)**

Trade	No. Registered	No. Recommended for Trade Test	Trade Tested	Competent	Not Yet Competent
<b>Boilermaker</b>	595	249	125	91	34
<b>Welder</b>	442	332	323	307	16
<b>Fitter</b>	522	144	79	23	56
<b>Motor Mechanic</b>	161	82	51	42	9
<b>Diesel Mechanic</b>	405	261	77	69	8
<b>Hairdresser</b>	80	44	20	15	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2205</b>	<b>1112</b>	<b>675</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>128</b>

The difference between the number of registered persons and the number of those recommended for the Trade Tests, indicates that there are still candidates who have not completed the ARPL process/ activities. The ARPL process stops at the point where a candidate is recommended for a Trade Test. The information of the Trade Test and competence outcome is included in Table 1, to show the impact of the pilot.

The closeout report (*Op.Cit.*) prepared by colleagues at the Chief Directorate: National Artisan Development at INDLELA, notes the following significant challenges in the ARPL pilot.

- The scope of the pilot project was countrywide and should have been localised to avoid the extensive travelling needed, and to enable access to companies.
- The buy-in for the pilot from employers was limited, due to the lack of communication from Organised Business; as a result, there were challenges in gaining access to workplaces.
- The lack of communication from Organised Labour, with their constituencies, impacted on employer/ employee understanding of the pilot.
- Many of the persons put forward for ARPL had very limited experience of the entire scope of the trade nominated, and were more suited for a full learning programme, than for ARPL.

Despite these challenges, the most significant output of the ARPL pilot was the development through lessons learned, of a new competency-based ARPL model. This model was based on the use of toolkits that also led to the eventual national Ministerial approval of the Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of ARPL (DHET, 2017). The model is presented in subsequent sections of this paper.

The initial draft model and toolkits from the national ARPL pilot were also subsequently piloted by the Western Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism (Smit and Prinsloo, 2017). This project included thirty (30) candidates, selected from a list of approximately 400 who applied to be included in the project. These candidates were spread equally across three trades, which included Boilermaker, Welder and Motor Mechanic. The Trade Test success rate was 79%.

The formal report of the Western Cape ARPL Pilot Project (DEDAT, c.2013) noted that the project had met its objectives, and that it had been a success

due to the involvement of key stakeholders, including DEDAT, the QCTO, the Manufacturing, Engineering, and Related Services SETA (MerSETA), members of the Artisan Development Working Group (ADWG), participant companies and colleges, and importantly, the RPL assessors and candidates. Despite the challenges of 'shifting timelines', the project had proved that the RPL toolkits were effective in the quality assurance process. The importance of developing mentoring skills in the workplace as a means to support apprentices, was noted. However, further research was said to be needed, to assess the impact of the initiative on the companies involved. The challenges noted, would be 'addressed through continued stakeholder involvement and resourcing'. It was further noted that maintaining and developing ARPL expertise was of critical importance for the future success and sustainability of such initiatives. Lastly, it was noted that beneficiaries should be placed 'at the centre' of initiatives, and that further developmental pathways after the ARPL process, needed to be considered.

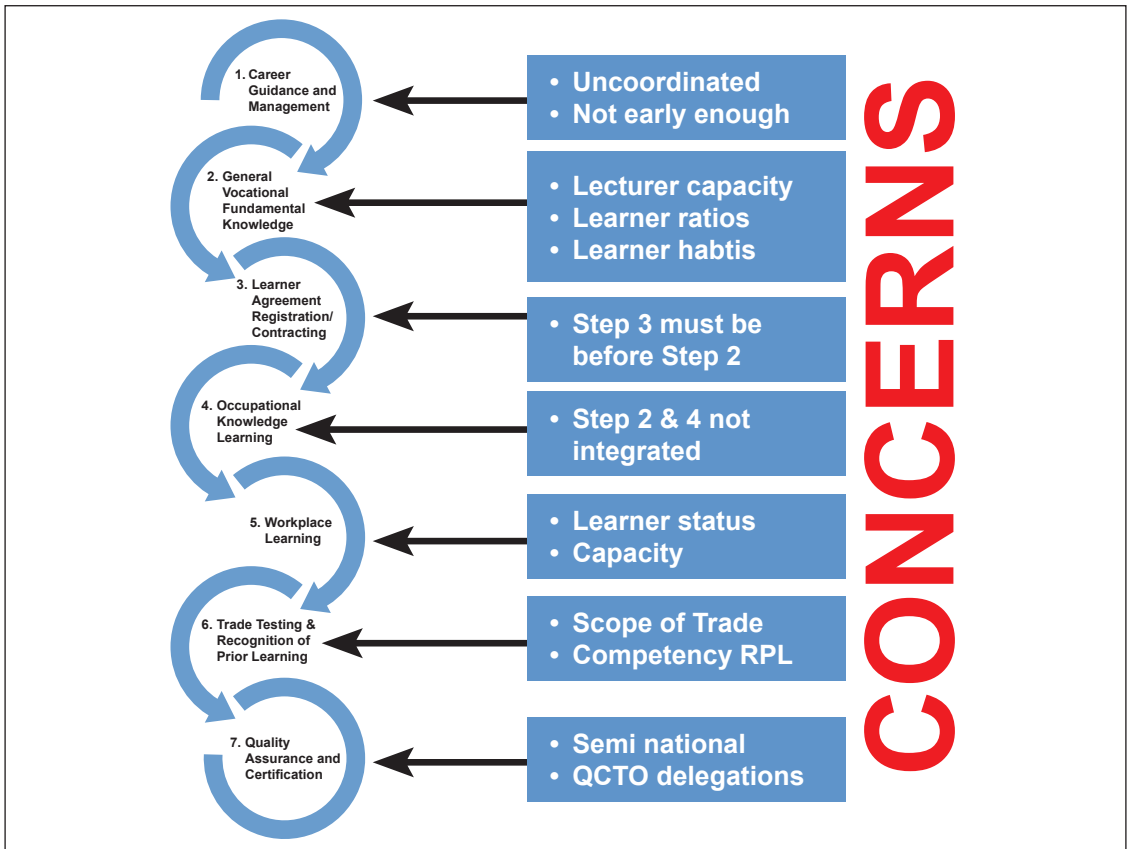
## **AN EMERGING NEW COMPETENCY-BASED ARPL PROCESS**

The results from the ARPL pilot projects described, and the advice from the ARPL Steering Committee – which was made up of industry and Organised Labour representatives who advised the DHET/ INDLELA on the pilots – resulted in an innovative artisan RPL model and system, with the accompanying, 'Draft National Policy, Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of ARPL' (DHET, 2015). This document introduced a proposed ARPL process, precipitated by the first National Trade Regulations in the country (RSA, 2015). The preamble to the Trade Test Regulations (*Ibid.*) stated that, "These Regulations ... enable the development of a single national approach to [the] [R]ecognition of [P]rior [L]earning for all artisan trades". This 'single approach' was clarified in Regulation 2(3) of the Trade Test Regulations (*Ibid.*), which stated that an applicant who had completed an RPL process, may substitute a Portfolio of Evidence approved by NAMB, in place of the proof of completion of a learning programme of an Occupational Qualification. The Regulations also

emphasised that ARPL must be part of a broader national artisan development system.

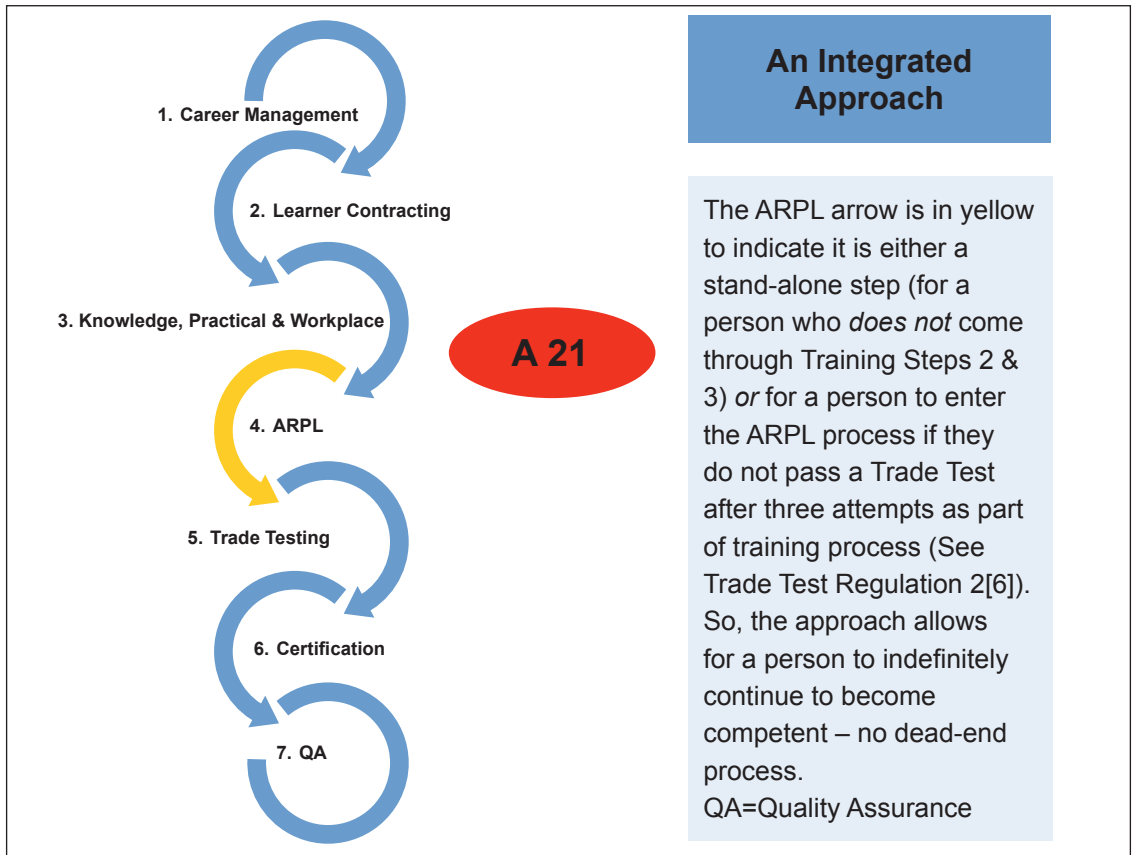
## **ARPL AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE NATIONAL ARTISAN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM**

One of the earliest outputs of the national artisan development system re-building process that commenced in November 2010, was the publication of the official document, 'National Programme for Artisan Development: Seven Steps to Becoming a Qualified Artisan' (DHET-INDLELA, 2013). The purpose of this booklet was to be 'an easy-to-understand guide' that explained the seven steps to becoming a qualified artisan in South Africa – from initial career guidance, through to final certification as a qualified artisan. The intention was to use the booklet to facilitate common understandings amongst all those with an interest in artisan development. The seven steps included RPL as an integral part of Trade-Testing where access to a Trade Test could be approved through an RPL process, for a person who had completed a certain period of time practically working as an artisan, in a specific trade. The booklet sought to address the version of knowledge of the artisan system, partly due to the more recent emphasis on 'the learnership system' introduced in 2000 with the new skills development legislation. The framework it presented also identified key concerns at each of the seven steps. Figure 1 shows the seven steps and the related concerns.



**Figure 1: Original seven steps to becoming an artisan, and the concerns (Source: DHET-INDLELA)**

The concerns with respect to ARPL were related to whether a person that came into the RPL process by virtue of a 'letter of service' that described his or her previous work, had enough experience to cover all the skills and knowledge of the entire occupation, known as the 'scope of the trade'. To address these concerns, it became apparent that ARPL needed to become a separate, stand-alone step within the Revised Seven Steps. In addition, a more competency-based approach needed to be adopted. Figure 2 illustrates the Revised Seven Steps.



**Figure 2: Revised Seven Steps to Becoming a Qualified Artisan (Source: DHET-INDLELA)**

The Revised Seven Steps process was developed in parallel to the development of the new Apprenticeship of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ('A21') initiative currently being implemented by the DHET as part of its Centres of Specialisation Programme. The implementation of the competency-based ARPL model and policy are currently being fast-tracked by the relevant role-players in the national artisan development system process. It is increasingly relevant in South Africa, given the growth of the informal economy that includes artisans who learn through work experience rather than through formal training.



A critical component of the competency-based ARPL system is the ARPL Toolkit which is, in effect, a detailed basic laypersons' guide for each occupation. The ARPL Toolkit leads candidates through a straight-forward step-by-step procedure, up to the completion of the ARPL process. The ARPL Toolkits can be used for access to a Trade Test for older 'legacy' or newer Occupational Qualifications<sup>96</sup>. The ARPL toolkits allow for accelerated developmental pathways for RPL candidates; the RPL requirements are clearly explained for each occupation, enabling a person to self-evaluate before formally entering the RPL process.

To date, ARPL Toolkits have been developed and approved by NAMB for the following trades, implemented from 19 October 2017: Boilermaker, Welder, Mechanical Fitter, Motor Mechanic, and Diesel Mechanic. The ARPL Toolkits for the trade 'Hairdresser', with three specialisations – in 'Afro', 'Gents', and 'Caucasian' – were implemented from 05 December 2017.

From 1 September 2019, the ARPL Toolkits have been available and can be implemented for the following trades: Electrician, Plumber, Fitter and Turner, Instrument Mechanic, Lift Mechanic, Sheet-fed Lithographer, Heavy Equipment Mechanic, Bricklayer, Carpenter, Ship Builder, Vehicle Painter, and Panel Beater.

## **BENCHMARKING THE SOUTH AFRICAN ARPL SYSTEM**

An opportunity arose in August 2018, to benchmark the new competency-based ARPL system in South Africa, with that in Mauritius, as part of a study tour arranged by the DHET in collaboration with the European Union (EU). Delegates from the DHET and QCTO in South Africa visited the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA). The internal DHET study tour report, which included details on numerous site visits to companies in Mauritius, outlines the key points regarding ARPL in Mauritius.

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<sup>96</sup> Legacy qualifications are those developed before the establishment of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa.

- RPL is conducted for a wide range of occupations in Mauritius, including for those who want to become certified artisans. Some RPL programmes are currently being piloted – for Construction Workers and Teachers of Children with Special Needs. The numbers of people in the pilot groups are relatively small, given the small population of the country.
- The Mauritius RPL Framework does not use a Trade Test to confirm artisan competence; instead, it uses the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) of the candidate. RPL assessments are based on trust and the judgement of the assessors, in the absence of an External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA)/ Trade Test.
- Training providers registered with the MQA train the assessors for the RPL process. These providers access funding from the Mauritian Skills Levy System – a system similar to the Skills Development Levy in South Africa. The assessments are conducted at the premises of these registered training providers. Both training and the assessments can also be conducted within companies.
- The challenges with RPL in Mauritius included the:
  - general lack of awareness and knowledge of RPL;
  - lack of candidate guidance and counselling;
  - lack of capacity/ inadequate number of RPL professionals; and
  - the costs/ funding and lack of competencies for upgrading the RPL candidate skills and/ or the competence to generate gap-fill training opportunities.

South Africa has experienced and addressed similar challenges to those identified in Mauritius.

- The awareness of ARPL was low, but is improving at a steady rate with its implementation.
- Administrators conduct orientation sessions with the ARPL candidates; advice is given and not counselling, which could provide challenges, as the administrators are not trained as counsellors.

- The capacity building/ development of RPL assessors is done through workshops hosted by DHET-INDLELA on a regular basis. All assessors must be subject matter experts.
- The costing of ARPL was done by DHET-INDLELA but was not agreed to by Organised Labour and Organised Business. Trade Test Centres (TTC) can charge whatever amounts they choose, until such time as the fees are regulated. Public and private costing differs; there is government funding for public institutions.
- The duration of the ARPL process is based on the availability of assessors.
- The ARPL experiences of candidates may differ from trade to trade and from TTC to TTC, due to complexities of the trade, the capacity at the centres, and expertise for using the ARPL Toolkits.

## CONCLUSIONS

While still in the early stages of development, the new competency-based ARPL model and system in South Africa are starting to gain traction amongst stakeholders. It is expected that this system will grow alongside the development and implementation of the broader national artisan and apprenticeship development strategies. The new ARPL system supports the implementation of the new Occupational Qualifications developed and quality assured by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. To take the system to scale, there is already well-advanced work on the development of the National Online Trade Testing System that includes the entire ARPL process. Once active, this system will enable all accredited assessment centres to accept and process increased numbers of ARPL candidates across the country. It is important to note that the new system is being implemented incrementally, through an ongoing interactive stakeholder consultative process, rather than an academic research process. The end result is thus a model that is continuously tested and re-tested until it actually works in real time in the real world, and is not only a theoretical construct that still requires proof of the concept.

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**INCLUSIVITY,  
ADULT LEARNING,  
SKILLS DEVELOPMENT,  
AND WORKERS' EDUCATION  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**



# **PAPER 9**



## ***Kha Ri Gude: Inclusivity and Adult Learning***

*Mr Tshepho Mokwele*

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### **ABSTRACT**

The *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign launched by the South African Government in 2008, was intended to reduce the illiteracy rate amongst adults in the country. Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South Africa has introduced various initiatives to improve literacy among adults who were deprived of quality and equal education under *apartheid*<sup>97</sup>. As one of the recent initiatives, the *Kha Ri Gude* Campaign targeted 4.7 million adult learners across the country, to improve the literacy rate. This paper explores the extent to which the campaign has reached this target and what this means, if anything, for inclusivity in education, training, development and work in the context of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The National Learners' Record Database (NLRD) records show that 2, 974 117 learners completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme between 2008 and 2016. The data show, *inter alia*, that the number of completions fluctuated yearly in this period. The predominantly rural provinces had the highest numbers of completions, while more female than male learners completed the programme. The majority of learners who completed the programme were African, with White people accounting for the lowest number. The paper argues that this signified inclusivity while the design, delivery, assessment and moderation/ verification of the programme contributed to its successes, notwithstanding some challenges. In conclusion, the paper supports the idea that the programme was an innovative Adult Education and Training model that improved the country literacy rate and contributed to inclusivity.

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<sup>97</sup> The pre-democracy unfair, unequal, race-based system in South Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign or programme which the Department of Education (DoE), as it was known at that time, launched in 2008 with the aim of improving literacy rates among adults in South Africa. The paper also considers whether (and how) the initiative has contributed to fostering inclusivity as envisaged in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) under the NQF Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2008)<sup>98</sup>. The campaign was intended to reach about 4.7 million adult learners across the country throughout its lifespan; it was phased-out in 2017. This paper looks into the extent to which the campaign reached its targets and what this means, if anything, for inclusivity in education, training, development and work in the context of the NQF.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first provides a brief background to the NQF, which seeks, among other things, to promote and achieve inclusivity in education, training, development and work in South Africa. The second section offers an overview of the latest adult (il)literacy rate statistics internationally, in Africa and South Africa. The third section presents a historical background to, the rationale for, and the design of, the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign. This is followed by the fourth section, which outlines the objectives of the South African Qualifications Authority's (SAQA's) National Learners' Record Database (NLRD); highlights SAQA's involvement in the moderation/ verification of the programme since its launch; and presents the *Kha Ri Gude* data on learner achievements as recorded in the NLRD for the duration of the initiative. The paper closes with a brief discussion around whether and how the campaign has contributed to inclusivity in the education and training system in the country.

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<sup>98</sup> The NQF Act (RSA, 2008) was recently amended to address, amongst others, dealing with the misrepresentation of qualifications and part-qualifications (RSA, 2019).

## **NQF: AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM FOR EDUCATION, TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND WORK IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was conceptualised as “an all-encompassing education and training system, where all sectors and levels of education and training are included” (Stoltz-Urban and Govender, 2014:201). The NQF was established through the promulgation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1995) that was replaced with the NQF Act (RSA, 2008), promulgated in 2009, and later, supplemented by the NQF Amendment Act (RSA, 2019). SAQA, as a statutory body, is mandated to oversee the implementation and further development of the NQF in South Africa’s education and training system. Section 4 of the NQF Act (RSA, 2008) states that the NQF is “a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training (DHET) for the classification, registration, publication, and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications”.

Drawing on this overarching function, Section 5(1)[a]-[d] of the NQF Act sets out the primary objectives of the NQF. First, the NQF seeks to create a single, integrated national framework for learning achievements. Secondly, to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths. Thirdly, to enhance the quality of education and training. Lastly, to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities. These objectives, Section 5(2) stipulates, are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social as well as economic development of the nation at large (RSA, 2008).

Blom and Keevy (2007) noted that – before the NQF Act came into effect in 2009 – a shared understanding of an ‘integrated’ NQF (education and training system) was challenging to achieve. However, the evolution of the NQF, the authors (*Ibid.*) further note, presented a shift in, among other things, the purpose, scope and prescriptiveness of the framework. There has been a shift from an NQF that attempted to integrate all aspects of the education and training system,

to a comprehensive and coordinated NQF comprising three distinct, articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks that are overseen by three Quality Councils respectively.

These NQF Sub-Frameworks are the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF), the quality assurance of which is overseen by Umalusi<sup>99</sup>, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), respectively. Taken together, these articulated NQF Sub-Frameworks make up the South African NQF, which seeks to promote and achieve inclusivity<sup>100</sup> in education and society through an integrated system of education, training, development and work. According to the 2014 NQF Impact Study (SAQA, 2017:181), the education and training system in South Africa is oriented towards inclusivity. This is evidenced by among other things the public and private funding of the system, the admission policies of public and private education and training institutions, the emphasis on student/ learner support, and additional policies and institutions that seek to advance inclusivity. The *Kha Ri Gude*<sup>101</sup> Mass Literacy Campaign – an adult literacy programme launched in February 2008 and concluded in 2017 – is one of the initiatives that sought to promote and improve adult literacy and, through this initiative, the socio-economic conditions in South Africa.

## ADULT LITERACY: GLOBAL, AFRICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN OVERVIEWS

Adult literacy is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)<sup>102</sup> as, “the percentage of the population aged 15 years and above who can both read and write with understanding a short, simple

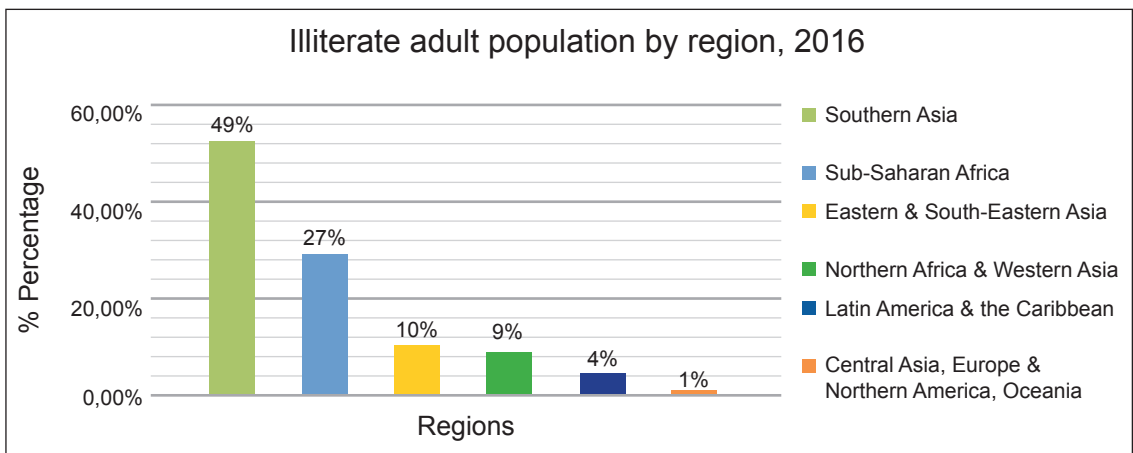
<sup>99</sup> Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.

<sup>100</sup> Inclusivity is defined as “the practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities and members of minority groups”, in the Oxford Dictionary online (accessed at <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/inclusivity>, on 6 January 2020).

<sup>101</sup> *Kha Ri Gude* is a Tshivenda phrase that means, ‘Let us learn’ in English.

<sup>102</sup> UNESCO’s definition of ‘Adult literacy’ was accessed at, <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/adult-literacy-rate>, on 6 January 2020.

statement on his or her everyday life”. Literacy also generally encompasses numeracy, which is the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. Data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics show that the global adult literacy rate was 86% in 2016 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017). However, 750 million adults across the globe still lack basic reading and writing skills – they are illiterate. Twenty-seven per cent (27%) of these illiterate adults are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, the second largest number after Southern Asia (49%). This is followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (10%), Northern Africa and Western Asia (9%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (4%). Less than 2% of the population represented Central Asia, Europe and Northern America, and Oceania combined (*Ibid.*:3). Figure 1 illustrates adult illiteracy rates by region for the year 2016, as published by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2017.



**Figure 1: Author illustration of adult illiteracy per region based on the 2016 UNESCO Institute for Statistics data (Source: UNESCO, 2017)**

The adult literacy rate in South Africa was reported to be at 94.4% in 2015, an increase from 88.7 % in 2007, which suggests an average annual increase rate of 1.05%, according to *Knoema*<sup>103</sup>. *Statista* also reported the adult literacy rate in

<sup>103</sup> *Knoema* is an open online data source that provides data analyses and visualisation from credible data sources such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Country Censuses, and others (South African literacy rates accessed on 6 January 2020, at <https://knoema.com/atlas/South-Africa/topics/Education/Literacy/Adult-literacy-rate>).

the country at 94.4% for the same year<sup>104</sup>. Although the South African education system “does not have the best reputation, its [adult] literacy rate is well above average among their geographical peers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Illiteracy is still a significant global problem, and Sub-Saharan Africa is not among the leading regions when it comes to literacy and education” (Statista, 2019)<sup>105</sup>. Compared to other ‘leading economies’<sup>106</sup> on the African continent, South Africa had the highest adult literacy rate for the year 2015: the other related rates were Nigeria (59.6%), Egypt (75.8%), Algeria (79.6%), Angola (71.2%), Morocco (71.7%), Ethiopia (49 %), Kenya (78 %), Sudan (58.6%), and Tanzania (77.9%)<sup>107</sup>. Figure 2 illustrates the 2015 adult literacy rate data from *Knoema* for the ‘leading economies’ on the continent.

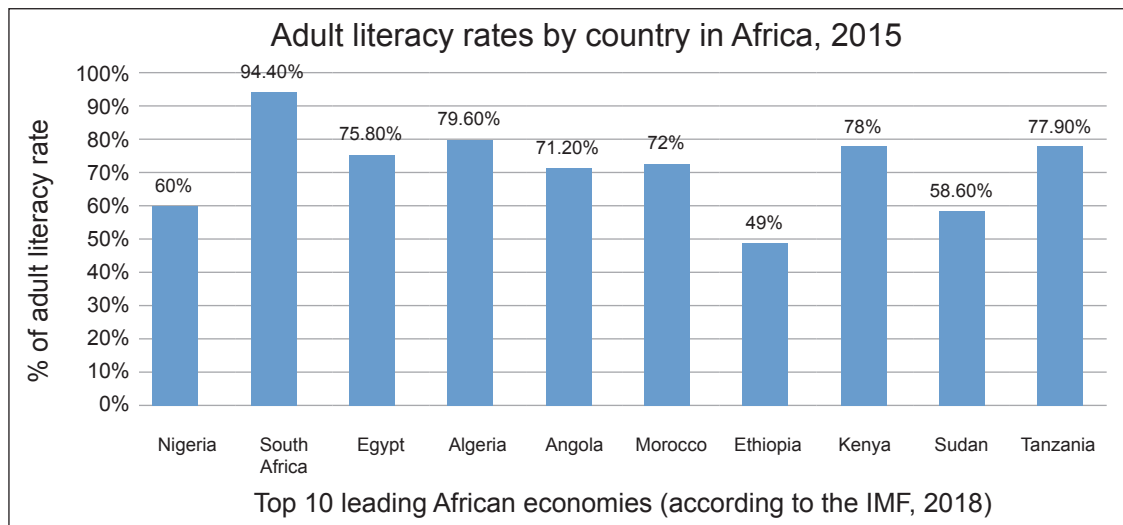
Some scholars such as Aitchison (2016) note that the ‘proxy’ and self-reported sources of data are not always reliable. However, organisations such as the *UNESCO Institute for Statistics* rely on census data and other data sources provided by individual countries. South Africa, like many other countries, currently does not make use of any means of direct testing from which a more reliable set of adult literacy baselines could be drawn (Aitchison, 2016: 134). That said, South Africa’s adult literacy compares well with other countries on the continent, as the data above suggest.

<sup>104</sup> Statista is a similar platform to *Knoema* (Accessed on 6 January 2020, at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/572836/literacy-rate-in-south-africa>).

<sup>105</sup> Statista accessed on 6 January 2020, at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/572836/literacy-rate-in-south-africa>

<sup>106</sup> In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) *per capita* reported by the IMF for 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Adult literacy rates for all countries, including the selected African nations, accessed on 6 January 2020, at <https://knoema.com/atlas/topics/Education/Literacy/Adult-literacy-rate>



**Figure 2: Author illustration of adult literacy rates among leading economies in Africa, 2015 (Source: *Knoema*).**

## ***KHA RI GUDE* MASS LITERACY CAMPAIGN: HISTORY, BACKGROUND AND DESIGN**

Adult literacy has long been viewed as a mechanism for social change – a vehicle that empowers and gives voice to the poor, marginalised, excluded and oppressed (Pretorius, 2004:343). Adult Education was severely neglected by the state during *apartheid*, but “was largely provided for, and driven by, Non-Governmental Organisations, where it developed strong emancipatory characteristics” (*Ibid.*). The democratic dispensation brought with it various programmes with the aim of reducing and/or eradicating illiteracy among adults, the majority of whom are Black people, and poor. The then-Department of Education (DoE) established a special Directorate for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) in 1995, which indicated that the democratic government viewed adult literacy in a serious light and recognised its valuable role as a tool for emancipatory social change (*Ibid.*).

In 2000, the government launched the *South African National Literacy Initiative* (SANLI) as part of the DoE’s National Literacy Campaign, but the introduction of this programme did not live up to expectations in terms of efficacy (Pretorius, 2004:344). It was intended that the ABET and SANLI initiatives would promote

universal access to education and, most importantly, minimise and ultimately eradicate illiteracy among adults. These interventions also sought to empower the previously socially disadvantaged groups, many of whom were deprived of educational opportunities during *apartheid* (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016).

However, scholars have argued that ABET did not make any impact in reducing the number of illiterate adult people (McKay, 2015:366; Pretorius, 2004). Following the “somewhat abortive literacy campaign [SANLI] in 2001” (Aitchison and Rule, 2016:401), the Minister of Education at that time, established a Ministerial Committee on Literacy (MCL) in 2006 to develop a strategic plan for a mass literacy campaign for adults in South Africa. The Committee produced a detailed proposal for a large-scale initiative that came to be known as the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign that aimed to reach some 4.7 million adults between 2008 and 2012 – the initial phase of the programme (*Ibid.*:401; McKay, 2015:366).

The *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign was conceptualised in the context of local and international policies, legislation and declarations (McKay, 2015) that champion, *inter alia*, inclusivity in education and society. Aitchison and Rule (2016) make mention of Adult Education in the context of the democratic state of South Africa. Chapter Two of the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996) contains the *Bill of Rights* of which Section 29 states that: “Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible”. The *Bill of Rights* section goes on to say that:

“Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice, in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of this right, the State must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into

account equity; practicability; and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.”

Aitchison and Rule (2016:401) also make an important observation that these statements do not make any exceptions based on age, which means that the legislation provides for adults and Adult Education. In addition to the *Bill of Rights* in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, McKay (2015) provides useful local and international contexts for the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign. The initiative was also in line with – and informed by – UNESCO’s *Education for All (EFA) Goal 4*, which committed South Africa and other countries, to reducing adult illiteracy rates by half, by 2015. The campaign further recognised the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which South Africa ratified in 2007, as necessary to the provision of Adult Education to learners including blind and deaf people, and other disabled persons (MacKay, 2015).

McKay (*Op.Cit.*:368) importantly notes that, “the campaign was informed by the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to ensure equivalence with the formal schooling system and to make manifest the continuum of literacy and lifelong learning”. The NQF accredits Unit Standards that culminate in qualifications for all levels of learners. According to McKay (2015:368), the “Unit Standards for qualifications assigned to specific NQF levels, informed the development of the campaign curriculum, providing target steps in terms of learning outcomes, and quality and assessment statements”. These quality criteria, McKay (*Ibid.*:369) notes, determined the level, range, and criteria for assessing such outcomes.

McKay (2015) also offers a detailed and useful analysis of the programme design, curriculum issues and assessment model. *Kha Ri Gude*, she notes, relied on pre-planned lessons and pre-prepared core materials developed in, ‘versioned’ and standardised across, the 11 South African official languages and related regional dynamics. The campaign strived to cater for learners with special needs through, for example, workbooks in Braille and large print for the visually

impaired. Moreover, the curriculum took a thematic and Freirean approach<sup>108</sup> to the teaching of reading, writing and numeracy, taking into account the language, socio-cultural and regional differences of learners (*Ibid.*:370; Romm and Dichaba, 2015:225).

The development of the core materials, McKay (2015:372) indicates, “was consistent with the learning outcomes defined by SAQA for each level”. Unit Standards of the NQF were critical for the determination of the level and range of competencies that learners needed to satisfy. The versioning of core materials, and the versioning and standardisation of learner assessment tools, were based on the expected learning outcomes for ABET Level 1 on the NQF (*Ibid.*). The *Kha Ri Gude* team developed national standardised ‘Learner Assessment Portfolios’ (LAPs) that were structured to measure the quality of learning outcomes at various (formative) times during the programme. This served as the continuous assessment of literacy at ABET Level 1 – the equivalent of Grade 3 in the GFETQSF. According to McKay (*Ibid.*), SAQA’s Unit Standards for ABET pre-Level 1 were used in the design of the learner assessment instrument, which enabled the programme to standardise its assessments across language, socio-cultural and regional settings.

Concerning the delivery of the programme, the classes were run by about 40,000 voluntary educators/ facilitators each year, who received small stipends (Aitchison and Rule, 2016:401). These classes were based mainly in informal locations such as shacks, homes, under trees, in mud huts, prisons, churches, and, in some cases, in schools (McKay, 2015:376). Approximately 4,000 supervisors and 4,000 coordinators supervised, trained, oversaw, managed, and supported the voluntary educators. A *cascade model* was adopted in which about 18 learners were assigned to one voluntary educator; a group of 20 voluntary educators reported to, and were supported by, a supervisor, who was overseen by a coordinator (Romm and Dichaba, 2015:225).

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<sup>108</sup> The Freirean approach is an empowering, emancipatory approach – in adult literacy education, it bases the content of language lessons on learners’ cultural and personal experiences (Spener, 1992). Learning to read and write flows from the discussion of themes of importance to adult learners, drawn from their real-life experiences.

## ***KHA RI GUDE LEARNER ACHIEVEMENTS***

### ***National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)***

The National Learners' Records Database (NLRD), managed by SAQA, maintains NQF-related information, including that used by SAQA's Verification- and Foreign Qualification Evaluation Services. SAQA makes NLRD information available to the public, in line with the Protection of Personal Information (POPI) Act (RSA, 2013)<sup>109</sup>. The NLRD is, in essence, the electronic Management Information System of the NQF. Some of the records stored within it, as noted in SAQA's 2017 NQF Impact Study report (SAQA, 2019:44-45), include:

- all qualifications and part-qualifications registered on the NQF;
- all recognised Professional Bodies and their registered Professional Designations;
- information on the quality assurance bodies accredited to quality assure particular qualifications, and on qualifications registered but still needing quality assurers;
- education and training providers accredited to offer registered qualifications and part-qualifications; and
- data on learner achievements for studies relating to qualifications and part-qualifications, as well as Learnerships, in South Africa.

Learner achievement data from the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign were uploaded into the NLRD from 2008-2016. The campaign was phased out in 2017, and the data for this year either have not been submitted to, or recorded in, the NLRD at the time of writing.

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<sup>109</sup> The POPI Act was signed into law on 26 November 2013, but has not yet come into effect. It is generally thought that over two thirds of organisations in South Africa already comply with this Act.

## ***A brief overview of SAQA's involvement in Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign***

In 2007, SAQA agreed to assist with the quality assurance of the learning achievements in the *Kha Ri Gude* programme, according to a report by Adler, Aitchison and French (2009:1). During the first year of its implementation – 2008 – SAQA undertook a process of checking the alignment of core course materials and LAPs for ABET Level 1, and the first three levels of UNESCO's Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP)<sup>110</sup>. SAQA's moderation and inspection of these programme materials and LAPs for verification purposes and for the integrity of marking were found to meet the NLRD system requirements for the first year of implementation (Adler *et al* 2009:2; McKay, 2015:381). This enabled the NLRD staff to upload the *Kha Ri Gude* learner achievements.

Overall, SAQA's role in the *Kha Ri Gude* programme is aptly elucidated by McKay (2015:381). After checking the course materials and LAPs for alignment with ABET Level 1 requirements, a mark moderation/ verification process was carried out by SAQA/ with SAQA oversight. This was done through the examination of large samples of the completed LAPs, to ascertain the overall integrity of the marking. If and when the integrity levels were found to be acceptable, SAQA then examined the learner data to check if these databases satisfied the NLRD system requirements (*Ibid.*). The NLRD records, and is dependent on, the data that are submitted or made available by stakeholders.

*Hubutani Communication Enterprises* was contracted by SAQA to organise, oversee and report on the *marking* of the LAPs in the *Kha Ri Gude* campaign, on its behalf, and with the support of itself, the national Department of Education (DBE), and other stakeholders. The last year of DBE implementation of the *Kha*

<sup>110</sup> LAMP seeks to provide internationally comparable estimates and define finely graded levels of literacy competence. It aims to improve the quality of literacy data, especially at the national level, but also for international policy development and monitoring. These data are seen as essential for UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) initiative aim to meet the learning needs of children, youth and adults, by 2015 (Accessed on 6 January 2020, at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217138>).

*Ri Gude* programme – the 2016/2017 financial year – yielded 122,286 LAPs considered suitable for sampling for moderation (Hubutani Communication Enterprises, 2017). Hubutani moderated a sample of 9,714 (8% of the 122,286) LAPs in that year (*Ibid.*). This process revealed that the course materials and LAPs were “very much in line with the historical findings of SAQA’s moderation and verification process” (*Ibid.*:iii). The final report (*Ibid.*) recommended among other things, that SAQA record the results of the successful final-year *Kha Ri Gude* learners, in the NLRD, as had been the case for the previous years of the initiative. Hubutani Communication Enterprises (2017) also highly recommended the broad *Kha Ri Gude* model, including its external moderation and certification, for Adult Education and Training (AET) in general.

The following section of the paper shows the *Kha Ri Gude* learner achievements recorded on the NLRD from 2008 to 2016.

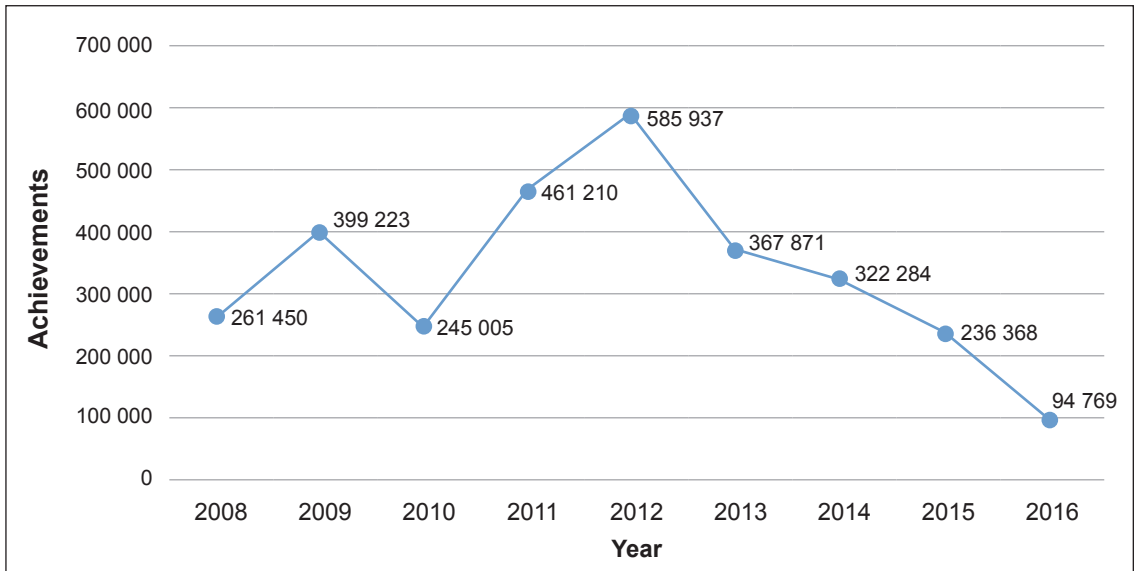
### ***Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign achievements: 2008-2016, NLRD***

According to the NLRD, the total number of learners who successfully completed<sup>111</sup> the *Kha Ri Gude* programme between 2008 and 2016, is 2 974 117. Further details are shown in the figures that follow. Figure 3 shows the number of successful completions of the programme per year from 2008 to 2016. It illustrates that learner achievement numbers fluctuated across the years.

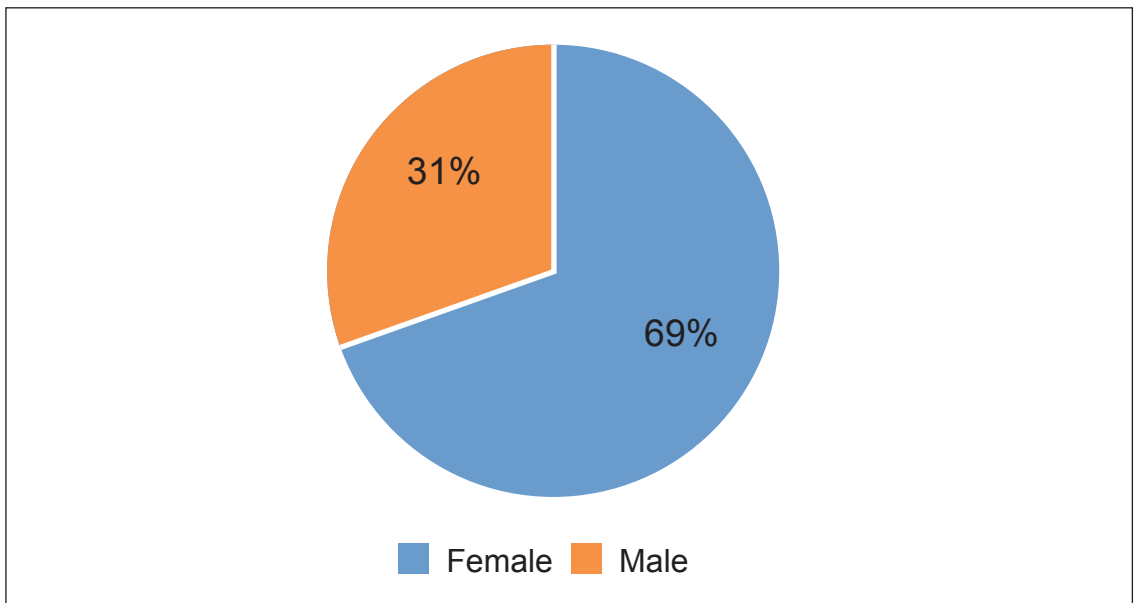
In 2008, 261,450 learners completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme. The highest number of achievements (585,937) was recorded for 2012, while the lowest (94,769) record was for 2016. While a report by *Hubutani Communication Enterprise* (2017) shows that 122,286 LAPs were completed for 2016/17, the NLRD has a record of 94,769 learner achievements for that year. This anomaly could be attributed to the non-submission of learner achievement data to the NLRD.

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<sup>111</sup> This figure should be taken to mean the number of learners whose LAP results were submitted to, and recorded in, the NLRD between 2008 and 2016.



**Figure 3: Total numbers of learners completing the *Kha Ri Gude* programme annually, 2008-2016 (Source: NLRD)**

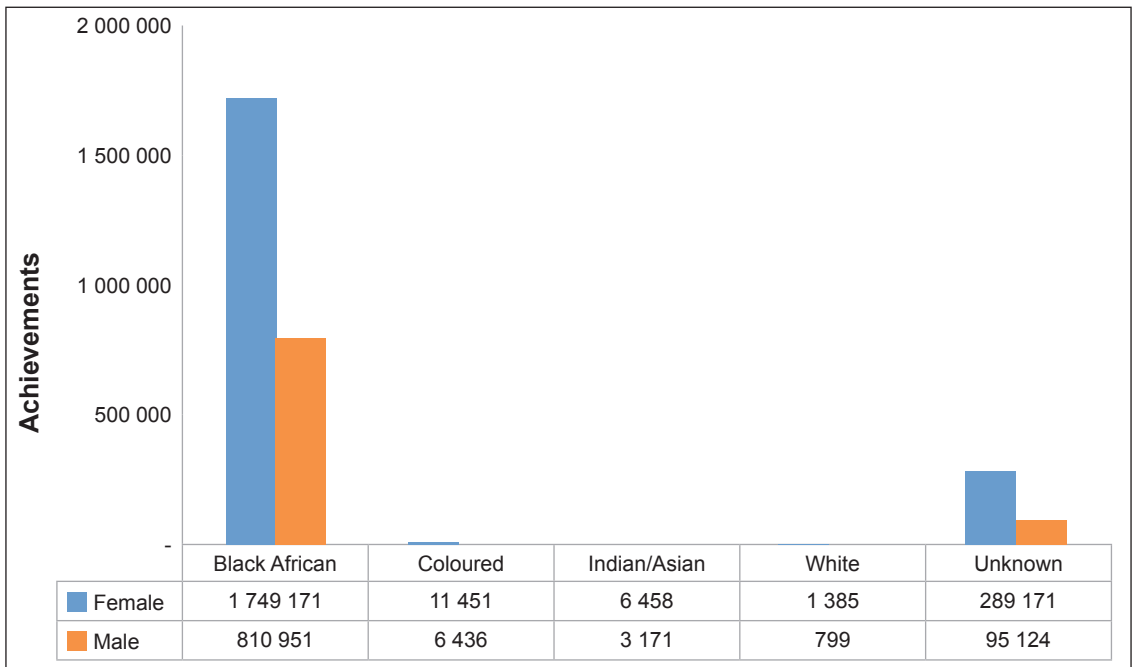


**Figure 4: Number of learners who successfully completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme by gender (Source: NLRD)**

It is essential to look at the gender proportions in the learner achievements. The *Kha Ri Gude* programme sought not only to improve adult literacy in South Africa, but also to capacitate the vulnerable members of society such as people with disabilities, the elders, and women, to participate meaningfully in the social and economic life. Figure 4 shows the percentages of female and male learners who completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme from 2008 up to the end of 2016. The overwhelming majority of learners (69%) who completed the programme are women, while 31% are men. This difference may be attributed to the number of *enrolments* by gender, where more female than male learners took part.

The *Kha Ri Gude* programme and the NQF, in general, strive for an inclusive and equitable society through an integrated education, training, development and work system. The South African *apartheid* government created a situation of “racially embedded poverty and inequality, reflected in the educational system with its strong separation between education for Whites [White people] and education for Blacks [Black people]. Blacks were allowed access [which in any case was not compulsory] only to underfunded and ill-equipped so-called *Bantu* education” (Romm and Dichaba, 2015:224).

The majority of learners who completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme are African (86.08%), followed by Coloured (0.60%), Indian/ Asian (0.32%) and White (0.07%), as illustrated in Figure 5. This is perhaps a reflection of the deeply racially and economically divided society in which the majority of African people who were not afforded quality and equal education, remain illiterate, impoverished and unequal to their counterparts.

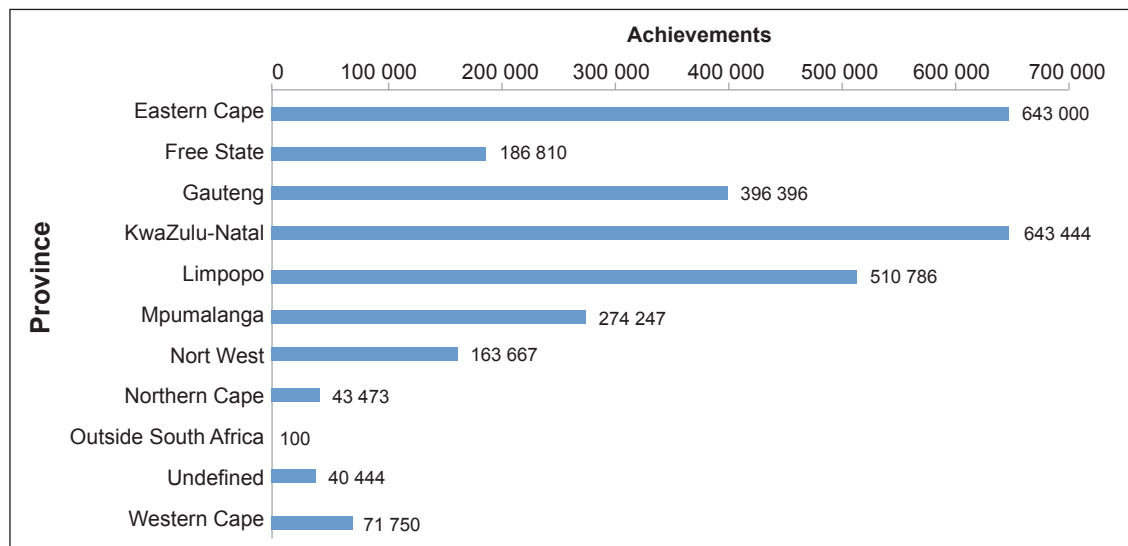


**Figure 5: Numbers of learners who have completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme, by population group, 2008-2016 (Source: NLRD).**

In terms of the achievements by provinces in South Africa, the three provinces with the highest numbers of learners who completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme are KwaZulu-Natal (21.63%), Eastern Cape (21.62%) and Limpopo (17.17%), as Figure 6 shows.

It can be deduced that the programme advanced the cause for redress and inclusivity because it was able to reach provinces dominated by communities that are primarily considered deeply rural, poor and peripheral in economic activities. Moreover, the course materials were versioned to the 11 official South African languages. While working on the core materials, voluntary educators/facilitators were encouraged to contextualise their lessons to learners' regional needs and/or lived experiences. They did this by "obtain[ing] authentic materials, posters and pamphlets from other ministries, churches, clinics, unions, and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)", to assist them in fine-tuning the lessons to meet individual learner needs (McKay, 2015:374). The educators/facilitators thus embraced the Freirean approach "to develop lessons based on the needs

and interests of the learners in order to invite them to take part in a larger community discourse” (Dichaba and Dhlamini, 2013:403). The high numbers of learner achievements in largely rural provinces could be ascribed to these factors, among other things.

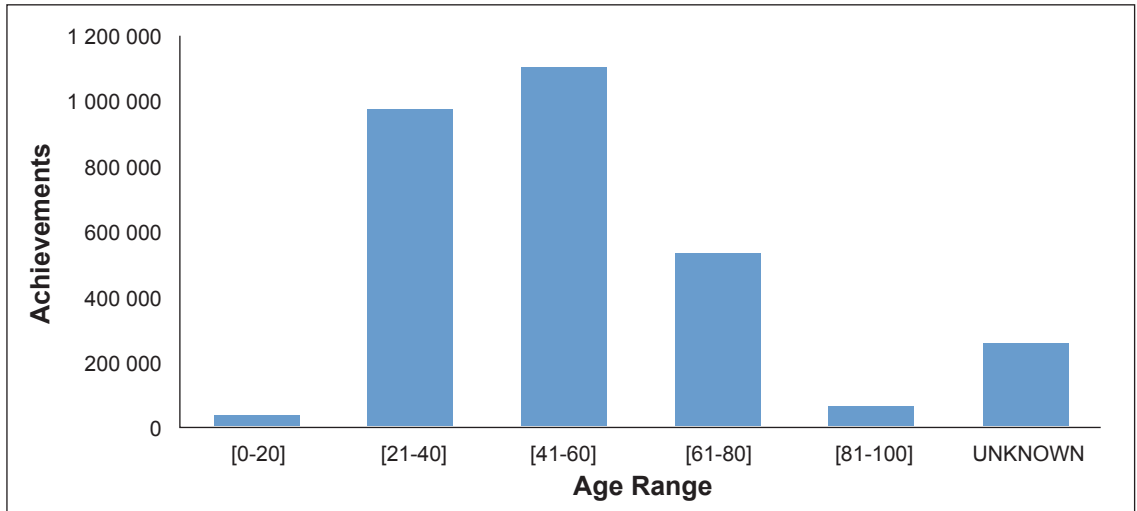


**Figure 6: Numbers of learners completing the *Kha Ri Gude* programme, by province, 2008-2016 (Source: NLRD)**

Adult literacy, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, refers to the percentage of the population aged 15 years and above, who can both read and write with understanding, a short, simple statement on his or her everyday life. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics offered this definition of adult literacy (UNESCO, 2017). In its General Household Survey (STATSSA, 2016), South Africa defines adult literacy as relating to individuals aged 20 years and older. Figure 7 shows that in the age range of 0-20 years, the lowest number of *Kha Ri Gude* achievements was recorded.

This population group (0-20 years old) might have recorded the lowest achievements because they were not the target group, while some may have been in school, Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions, or work. The population group with the age range of 81-100 years recorded the second-lowest number of achievements. This could be due to the small population size

of older people. The highest proportion of learners who completed the *Kha Ri Gude* programme were aged between 41-60 years (37.12%), followed by 21-40 years (32.81%) and 61-80 years (17.83%).



**Figure 7: Number of learners completing *Kha Ri Gude* programme by age range (Source: NLRD)**

## CONCLUSION

This paper explored the *Kha Ri Gude* programme that aimed to reach about 4.7 million learners in South Africa, in its lifespan. As the NLRD data have shown, 2 974 117 learner achievements were recorded for the programme in the period 2008-2016. The *Kha Ri Gude* programme, unlike previous initiatives aimed at providing ABET, made significant strides and propelled inclusivity in education, training, development and work. The success of this programme owes to its *design model*, including curriculum development and core materials; the *delivery* through 11 official South African languages in South Africa and the use of core materials and context-specific materials for lessons; the *assessment* that was continuous and undertaken through national standardised LAPs; and the *moderation* of the course materials and LAPs by SAQA for the recording of learner achievements on the NLRD system. It is for this reason that, while acknowledging that the programme experienced some challenges, the last

moderation report highly recommends the broad model of *Kha Ri Gude* campaign, including its external moderation and certification, as it constitutes the provision of a remarkable innovation in AET.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# PAPER 10



# The Skills Development and Job Creation Potential of Infrastructure Maintenance: A Social Exchange Model

*Professor Kevin Wall*

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## ABSTRACT

Many South Africans, especially those with low skills levels, are unemployed. Thus more jobs are needed which require low skills levels, and which will enable people to up-skill while working. The failure of infrastructure for water, roads, and electricity has severe consequences for human development, poverty alleviation and economic growth. In some areas of South Africa, infrastructure failure negates the impact of the development undertaken to date. There is a need for infrastructure maintenance year after year. Much maintenance work can only be done, or can best be done, by labour-intensive methods, and/or by workers with entry-level skills. Thus addressing maintenance backlogs would generate extensive opportunities for job creation and skills development. However, this is easier said than done. The 'social exchange' model speaks to both skills exchange and job creation. It involves creating partnerships based on exchange principles relating to quality control and mutual incentives. Piloted in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, it has since been rolled out to scale to over 100,000 learners, and a few thousand households. This initiative has simultaneously brought about (1) the maintenance of selected infrastructure, and returning it to service; and (2) micro-business development and nurturing, job creation, and skills development for people mostly based in rural areas. Most of these people had never before in their lives received training which could enable them to undertake wage-earning jobs.

## INTRODUCTION

It is generally known that many South African school-leavers find it difficult to get jobs because their skills levels are too low. Therefore, if so many lack the necessary skills, more jobs are needed of a type that they can do and which will

enable them to up-skill while working. Millions of South Africans are unemployed: the official unemployment rate rose to 29.0% in the second quarter of 2019 – meaning that there were 6.7 million people officially without jobs (Statistics South Africa [STATSSA], 2019). The expanded unemployment figure, which takes into account people who are not economically active, increased to 38.5% (*Ibid.*). There is a significant correlation in this: those with the lowest skills levels have, everything else being equal, the smallest chance of obtaining jobs.

The youth are particularly hard-hit by high unemployment. The official unemployment rate among adults<sup>112</sup> was 18.0%, while “of the 20.4 million young people aged 15-34 years, 40.3% were not in employment, education or training [NEET]” (*Op.Cit.*).

Employment is vital to social, economic and political development; it is a key mechanism for addressing widespread poverty and inequality. Many of the soft skills such as punctuality, discipline, the ability to work in a team and others needed to enhance employability, are developed in workplaces. The workplace is a preferred site for the acquisition of these soft skills in addition to being a site for the acquisition, or improvement, of task-specific skills.

If many people in the country have low skill levels, then South Africa needs more jobs that require these skill levels. Workplaces need to enable people to acquire these soft skills and improve their task-specific skills. High unemployment, particularly among the youth with low skills levels and lack of work experience, underscores the need for the creation of sufficient jobs of this kind.

## **THE POTENTIAL OF INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION**

Engineering infrastructure (such as reservoirs, pipes, treatment works, bridges, roads, rail, harbours, and electricity distribution) supports peoples' quality of

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<sup>112</sup> Following South Africa's National Youth Commission Act No. 19 of 1996 (Notice No. 633 from the President's Office, 1996), an 'adult' is defined as someone who is 35-64 years old.

life and the economy, if it delivers accessible and reliable services. In order to achieve this purpose, infrastructure must be correctly operated and maintained. If not maintained, the infrastructure may continue to exist, but the service will deteriorate or may even cease. For example, if water pipes are not maintained the water will leak away, become contaminated and/or pressure will drop, or the water may no longer flow.

There is abundant evidence of the widespread poor maintenance of infrastructure in South Africa. Year after year, the operation and maintenance of infrastructure has in far too many cases, been found to not comply with the required standards (South African Institution of Civil Engineering [SAICE], 2011, 2017; Department of Water and Sanitation [DWS], 2019; Wall, 2019a). These operation and maintenance shortfalls are particularly visible in “the quality and reliability of basic infrastructure serving the majority of our citizens [which] is poor and, in many places, deteriorating further. Urgent attention is required to stabilise and improve these” (SAICE, 2011:5). The consequent service delivery failures point to the need for a turnaround strategy for municipal service delivery. Moreover, many of the so-called ‘service delivery protests’ have been linked to the breakdown of infrastructure.

While the government’s drive to provide new infrastructure to those who have never enjoyed services is endorsed, the challenge is to supplement this with the maintenance of both new and old infrastructure. It is important to note that the failure of infrastructure has serious consequences for human development, poverty alleviation, addressing inequality, and economic growth. The cost of not maintaining infrastructure is high; in some areas, infrastructure failure is negating the impact of the infrastructure development undertaken to date.

More than one State of the Nation Address (SONA) has noted that the construction sector is a known driver of work opportunities and learning at work. It must be borne in mind, however, that new construction activity is subject to periodic economic booms and busts. This pattern is influenced by several factors, principally the fluctuations in the economy, the changes in political priorities, and changing needs. The short-term demand for stadium and freeway

construction peaked during and rapidly unwound after the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa, for example.

As a result, most construction jobs, and particularly those for general workers, last only the duration of a construction project, which could be anything between a couple of months and, in relatively few cases, two to three years. The worker must then find another job which, in times of a downturn in construction activity (such as the present time), is difficult. An unskilled person has little chance of finding another job. Someone with skills is better placed to secure a job – thus, it is imperative that learning becomes part of work.

In contrast to new construction, infrastructure *maintenance* needs to take place regularly. Maintenance workers are thus needed not just for the limited construction period, but also regularly and throughout the lifespan of that infrastructure. Furthermore, much of the maintenance can only be done or can best be done, by labour-intensive methods and/or by workers who need have only entry-level skills initially, but which can be developed further.

Much construction activity is concentrated geographically; once a project is complete, attention shifts to a new site. In contrast, Engineering infrastructure exists in all corners of the land and maintenance is needed across the nation at all times, creating considerable potential for job creation and lifelong learning.

## **AN INNOVATIVE INSTITUTIONAL MODEL**

There is a high potential for job creation in infrastructure maintenance, but for this to be effective, substantial effort must go into managing the process and controlling the quality of this maintenance. Moreover, ways to address maintenance backlogs need to be found, to generate extensive opportunities for skills development and job creation in South Africa.

Encouraging examples are found in existing programmes, some of which are long-running and which create jobs for those currently with entry-level skills, while also addressing the maintenance of the infrastructure. One such

programme is *eThekwini* Municipality's Zibambele Road Maintenance initiative, which commenced in 2003 and is still running, that "binds asset maintenance and poverty alleviation" (Purchase, 2010:38).

"The one end of the contract is that Zibambele contractors are expected to carry out routine, low-intensity maintenance on both gravel and blacktop and tar roads. The beneficiaries are expected to clear the road verges of vegetation and litter, keep the sidewalks, drains and road surfaces clear of silt and debris, and keep the grass short on the road edges .... The other end of the contract is that the *eThekwini* Municipality provides the beneficiaries with an alternative to poverty" (*Ibid.*)

This paper outlines an institutional model for skills exchange and job creation in the maintenance of infrastructure. The social exchange model utilises concepts formulated by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and developed by the CSIR in collaboration with the Water Research Commission (WRC) in South Africa. The model involves creating partnerships for skills development and job creation, based on exchange principles relating to quality control and mutual incentives (Wall, 2005; Wall and Ive, 2010).

## **OVERVIEW OF THE INITIATIVE**

Social exchange partnerships are especially suitable for communities with large poor populations which are in need of infrastructure services, and who are also looking for employment and opportunities to develop technical and entrepreneurial skills and knowledge. The concept of social exchange provides opportunities for linking local economic development, job creation and skills development with the provision of basic municipal and community services.

The concept as it has been implemented in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa for the past decade provides appropriate training, a quality management system (QMS) and procedures, and the backup of the off-site skills held by the development partner. The development partner identifies people dwelling in

the target area who have the basic skills and dispositions needed to manage micro-businesses and who, once they have been exposed to training, are willing to enter into business agreements. Key enablers are the willingness of the public sector authorities/ owners of the infrastructure, to outsource their responsibilities for routine servicing, and the ability of these authorities to procure, appoint and direct micro-businesses to undertake the work under the guidance of the development partner.

Traditional institutional approaches to infrastructure operation and maintenance (for example, in-house responsibility for this) have incorporated the building of capacity and the development of skills in attempts to improve service delivery. However, many of these approaches have had limited success because they have not enjoyed sufficiently strong incentive structures and support systems. In contrast, the innovative and practical social exchange partnership approach is built on a robust foundation of mutual support and incentives.

This model has successfully addressed – and continues to address – a portion of infrastructure-related problems widely encountered in South Africa. The Eastern Cape Province Department of Education (DoE) faced a crisis brought about by the lack of the maintenance of school toilets over many years. In 2009, the department agreed to collaborate with the CSIR and others in a pilot programme for the servicing of all toilets at 400 schools (the total of which is of the order of more than 5,000 toilets). Since then, having noticed how effective this intervention has been, the nearby district municipality agreed on a pilot to service 400 household toilets. Both pilots were very successful on all accounts (Wall and Iwe, 2013).

These two extensive pilots (one at schools, and one for private households) have subsequently been rolled out on a financially self-sustainable basis. Using the social exchange partnership model has brought about both the:

- maintenance of selected infrastructure, and returning it to service; and
- job creation and skills development of (mostly) rural people who had never before received training that enabled them to do wage-earning jobs.

## THE SCHOOLS' PILOT

### *Description of the schools' pilot*

A description of the schools' pilot (2009-2013) can serve to outline the social exchange approach applied in practice. Subsequent projects have adopted this approach broadly, even though the type of infrastructure, locality and participants have changed. The focus of education authorities in the schools' sector in South Africa has arguably been on curriculum development and classroom-based activities. Far too often, little attention has been paid to the essential supporting infrastructure. Repair and maintenance issues are often sidelined or ignored. As a result, much of rural schools water and sanitation infrastructure is either:

- dysfunctional, requiring radical interventions (extensive refurbishment or total rebuilding); or,
- serviceable but deteriorating and likely to deteriorate further if not supported by good operation and maintenance.

It is argued that at a local level the negative impact of poor sanitation and the non-availability of clean water in schools deprives learners of the infrastructure support they need to enable them to focus on their studies. The health and social problems arising from the lack of these basic services spill over into the community. For example, the learners should be receiving good water and sanitation practices at school, and take this understanding and the practices to their home settings. However, this often does not happen.

In 2009, the Irish Aid, CSIR, WRC, DoE and *Amanz' Abantu Services*<sup>113</sup> agreed to implement a three-year pilot for the routine servicing of water and sanitation facilities at 400 schools in the Butterworth Education District. The scope of work was agreed, and training and operation plans were developed. Advertisements

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<sup>113</sup> 'Water for the people' in the *Xhosa* language

called for parties interested in becoming water services micro-enterprise partners, to come forward. The parties had to be resident in the Butterworth area for two reasons:

- to ensure that the work would be done by local people drawn from the communities that would be served; and,
- in order to minimise the travelling time and costs, for the Butterworth District and schools that would be serviced.

Prospective local micro-business partners were screened and those short-listed were interviewed in more depth. Before commencing work, the selected aspirant micro-entrepreneurs received appropriate initial training from the East London-based water services company, *Impilo Yabantu*<sup>114</sup> (the development partner), and skills-related assistance with setting up their businesses. After that, the trainee micro-business partners and the development partner met with the DoE Butterworth District staff and school principals in order to plan their programme schedules, and agree on work orders.

The trainee micro-business partners, all local people and almost all first-time entrepreneurs, were supported in setting up micro-businesses as 'social entrepreneurs'. The initiative employed other local people, many of whom were previously unemployed, which helped them to engage in learning and paid work. Under the guidance of the development partner, these teams undertook the initial cleaning and, after that, the routine servicing of the water and sanitation facilities at the schools. The development partner, *Impilo Yabantu*, continued to provide structured learning in the form of mentoring and non-formal further training as and when necessary. An interview clip is provided in Box 1.

In respect of the schools' pilot (now concluded), the cost of methodology development, training and further assistance, and the cost of documentation of the learning, was borne by a combination of external funding from the Irish

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<sup>114</sup> 'Hygiene for the people' in the *Xhosa* language.

Aid and WRC, and corporate social responsibility contributions from *Impilo Yabantu's* main shareholder, *Amanz Abantu Services*, and the CSIR. Each of these organisations invested resources because of their desire to improve the maintenance of infrastructure, service delivery, and to develop skills and create jobs.

**Box 1: Clip from interview with a social entrepreneur**

Social entrepreneur Nomandla Dokoda, 49, mother of five, said she had previously “been a teacher in Dutywa”. “After being a teacher for 15 years, I was well aware of the water and sanitation plight in our schools. That’s why I wanted to be part of a movement that was fixing the problem. I started the business with the first pilot of the project in Butterworth in 2009”. “My life has changed dramatically. The business has given me financial freedom and I am doing things I could not do as a teacher. I have employed seven people so far, and together we are skilled in plumbing, construction and maintenance” (Tanana, 2018:[np])

It was essential that the maintenance services which the micro-business provided in the pilot were paid for by the infrastructure owners (such as schools authorities or municipalities), from their budgets annually allocated for the operation and maintenance of infrastructure. If this was not done – and is not done in future such projects – the maintenance programmes will not be financially sustainable.

The micro-business partners were required to operate under the *Impilo Yabantu* brand and to conform in all respects with the operating model that it had developed (and which it has continued to develop further).

The development partner established and trained an in-house team. One purpose of this team was to provide the development partner with benchmark costs and an opportunity to further develop knowledge and skills, and test the methodology and procedures.

The development partner also developed and adopted a compulsory QMS as a framework to ensure that regular audits are undertaken, and to provide a system that enables the development partner to manage the documented work procedures. In the pilot and all subsequent work, spot checks were conducted by the development partner on randomly selected schools to ensure that the contracted standards of work were upheld.

A vital component of the service provided by the micro-business partners was the inspection of, and reporting on, the serviceability and suitability of the infrastructure facilities. Photographs assisted in the process of inspecting and assessing schools' future repair and maintenance needs. Reports compiled from these inspections were submitted to the district managers of the DoE at monthly meetings, and maintenance and repair lists then agreed upon for implementation in the subsequent month. In this manner, ongoing service relationships were developed between the micro-business partners, the school principals, and the DoE's district managers.

During the pilot, the development partner found it necessary to take direct responsibility for defining and securing the work orders. It then instructed the micro-business partners-in-training to perform the work. In effect, each maintenance order was a small contract: for the first round of maintenance, each order was between R2,000 and R5,000. For the second round of maintenance, which involved more comprehensive task lists, each order was between R10,000 and R15,000. The micro-business partners billed the schools (or the DoE on certain schools' behalf) each time they had done cleaning and maintenance. As noted earlier, this funding came – and must continue to come if the work is to be sustainable – from schools' budgets annually allocated for the operation and maintenance of infrastructure. Additional funds were not required.

The development partner played a critical role during the pilot, not only managing the administrative part of the process (checking and compiling invoices and ensuring payment from the DoE), but also being responsible for random checks

on micro-business partners for quality control, and processing the vast array of 'before and after' photographs from each school. Another key role of the development partner in the pilot was to address problems and issues quickly, as they arose. Such problems and issues were frequently encountered during the development of the process – for example, payment delays, failure of equipment, and schools found to have no working or even no repairable sanitation or water facilities.

The development partner developed the practical guidelines and operational strategies for the whole partnership and if necessary could be called on to develop new plans as needed, or address situation-specific issues. In order to accommodate variations in the types of toilets and top structures, and topography and geographical location in relation to key infrastructure, the development partner had to develop a range of methodologies for accessing household pits and waste disposal. For example, when the access to sludge pits could only be obtained by removing the toilet top structure, the development partner designed and built a trolley that enabled the structure to be 'manhandled' to one side. It is unlikely that a stand-alone micro-enterprise would have had the expertise or resources to do this. Thus, the development partner's ability to innovate on behalf of the micro-business partners is a significant advantage of the social exchange approach.

All, or nearly all, of the micro-entrepreneurs (the franchisees) had completed secondary school. The skills they learned on the project were estimated to be roughly at NQF Level 5 (post-school level). These skills were however learned non-formally. The general workers employed by the micro-entrepreneurs had lower levels of skills: very few had completed their schooling. The skills they learned in the initiative were of a technical nature, at the most basic levels. These workers did not learn the business-type skills.

The primary objective of the Butterworth schools' sanitation and water servicing pilot project was to develop and test an outsourcing concept using a social exchange approach, which could be scaled up to roll out similar services to most

of the more than 6,000 public schools across the 23 education districts in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa. Without question, the project succeeded in achieving its objectives, and the research, and the development funding was spent usefully.

## **POST-PILOT: UNDERSTANDING THE LESSONS**

### ***Reliable income stream is vital***

The pilots developed useful and replicable business plans, with tried-and-tested operating procedures and learning pathways, for the maintenance and routine servicing of the sanitation and water facilities commonly found in the small towns and rural areas of the Eastern Cape. Scaling up had to be financially viable. That is, the owners of infrastructure who received any kind of service from the micro-business partners had to pay the partners the fees agreed upon before the commencement of the work. This income stream had to be steady and sufficient so that each micro-business partner could cover all costs, including both a reasonable wage for the micro-entrepreneur, and fees for the development partner. This income was also needed to build a prudent level of reserves to cover the lean times, such as when clients took too long to pay, and/or work was slow to come. *Impilo Yabantu* has, since the end of the pilots in 2012, strictly followed this principle when approaching any initiatives.

There is a need for greatly improved willingness on the part of officials to make commitments and to adhere to them and, in particular, to pay service providers and suppliers on time and in full. The owners of infrastructure must pay on time and in full for the services rendered.

The development partner and micro-business partners were mutually dependent in many ways, particularly with respect to financial viability. Thus, for example, if the micro-business partners could not cover their costs, the

development partner would find it difficult to remain in business and provide them with services going forward.

Micro-business partners are not unique in looking to be paid in order to stay afloat. All types of outsourcing by public sector bodies are jeopardised if they are unable to pay in strict accordance with the contractual requirements. Everything else being equal, stand-alone micro-businesses could go insolvent first, followed by micro-business partners, and thereafter by the larger businesses. Moreover, it is likely that the public sector bodies will find no takers when they try to outsource, or bidders will load their prices in order to cover themselves against the unknown.

### ***Additional services***

In an early evolution of the social exchange approach, the micro-businesses also repaired the toilets and rainwater-harvesting facilities at the schools. The development partner has since periodically expanded its operations to provide a wider range of services, initially by introducing additional services such as solid waste disposal, a natural extension to the on-site sanitation programmes, especially given that, without a collection service, pit toilets rapidly fill up with inorganic waste. This developmental work is typical of that expected of a dynamic development partner, which needs to have a broad vision and to conceptualise and pioneer potential opportunities for micro-business partners.

The approach has since become more ambitious in several ways, including that the toilet sludge is no longer disposed of but is now put to good use. In particular, the 2016-2019 programme funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB) involved micro-businesses (i) recycling bio-solids to beneficial by-products, and (ii) teaching hygiene education to school children<sup>115</sup>.

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<sup>115</sup> A key aspect of the hygiene education has been the creation of 240 'sanitation clubs' at schools, with more in the pipeline. These clubs are "comprised of teachers and learners that together with the 'sanipreneur' oversee the school programme" (Naidoo, 2019:4).

In this approach, the micro-business teams visit schools to collect the biosolids using ‘honeysucker’ trucks<sup>116</sup>. They then treat the sun-dried biosolids using extensive heating by pyrolysis that kills bacteria and pathogens, and turns the biosolids into safe biochar for soil amendment. Biochar effectively improves the soil by providing better retention of organics and nitrates in the soils. It also provides a host for micro-organisms that assist plants in breaking down nutrients in the soils, thereby assisting the roots in absorbing these nutrients. *Impilo Yabantu* has consistently played the development partner role, continuously supporting and empowering the micro-businesses to take up the innovations.

### ***Improved efficiency***

The amount of paperwork generated in the early days of the project was a serious concern. The development partner has since developed mobile phone technology to assist with reporting service problems, and with information-gathering and data collection. *Impilo Yabantu* also developed a software programme for micro-businesses to lodge reports of problem areas. One of the mobile applications is used to collect data, map service areas, and monitor the repairs being undertaken.

### ***Scaling up***

The initial pilot started with 10 trainee micro-business partners. A decade later the best of these – most of whom are women – are capable of working with minimal support from the development partner, and have mostly established their own companies, giving their businesses a more robust structure with greater credibility. The views of the Minister of Water and Sanitation in this regard are provided in Box 2.

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<sup>116</sup> This term is a euphemism for ‘vacuum tankers’, which suck the faecal sludge out of wherever it is – for example, a septic tank, pit latrine, and so on. The reason for the name is due to the resemblance in one respect only, to birds which have long beaks to suck pollen from flowers.

**Box 2: Supporting comment by the Minister of Water and Sanitation**

“Speaking at the Women in Water and Social Entrepreneurship Summit under the broad theme ‘From Research Science to Impact’, Water Affairs Deputy Minister ... said the work being done by the women was phenomenal ‘This has been an eye-opening experience’, she said” (Tanana, 2018:[np]).

The DoE schools’ sanitation and water programme has not expanded as extensively as was planned, but has continued at 300 schools in the municipal districts of Buffalo City and Amathole District Municipality, benefiting in the region of 100,000 learners. Further work, mainly consisting of the maintenance of household and communal ablution facilities, has come from those two municipalities themselves.

Experience has shown that some candidate micro-entrepreneurs do not progress beyond the trainee phase, and others drop out when work is slow to come. However, those who continue will as in the pilots be closely monitored and mentored by development partner field staff, while others in the development partner team will assist them with health, safety, and technical operations procedures.

Many more jobs could be created if the owners of infrastructure chose to budget enough to protect their infrastructure assets<sup>117</sup>, to enable the purchase of materials and the up-skilling of their employees. In addition, the asset owners need to collaborate with organisations that can employ and impart skills to emergent micro-entrepreneurs and personnel with entry-level skills.

The skills-for-infrastructure initiative pointed to the further relevance of such initiatives, for learning and work, through infrastructure maintenance.

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<sup>117</sup> The extent to which so many municipalities set aside woefully inadequate budgets for maintenance purposes, has been documented by the author (Wall 2019b, and others).

The initiative showed that infrastructure maintenance has great potential for employment and for learning – over and above its main purpose, which was and remains service delivery.

The skills created thus far, as described in this paper, are at the basic level because of the nature of the work involved. Because of the high levels of unemployment in the country, however, there is a great need for such initiatives to be replicated, so that the projects not only improve the condition of infrastructure (and ensure more reliable service delivery), but also create further jobs and the kinds of skills upgrades described in the paper.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The social exchange partnership concept has proven very successful in incentivising a professional approach to work and skills transfer in the infrastructure services sector to which it has been applied. On the one hand, restructuring the relationships between the user, client and service provider, transforms an often-neglected essential service into a contracted service. On the other hand, the contract between the development partner and the micro-business partner offers a stable relationship, as opposed to the larger entity hiring or partnering with people who simply leave if alternative employment is offered. Professionalising these services not only creates job opportunities and encourages small entrepreneurs to move into this sector, but also gives individuals a reason to take pride in having a career in a sector (sanitation), which may otherwise carry the stigma of being undignified and unrewarding. It also provides a training route that is directly linked to employment.

Being a successful development partner operating at the lower levels of the economic pyramid requires patience, while at the same time insistence on compliance with predetermined standards. Unlike working with contractors, where there are contracts with clear-cut conditions and penalties for non-performance, working in a social exchange context requires the development partner to nurture and mentor the micro-business partners/ micro-

entrepreneurs to ensure the maintenance of an environment conducive to stimulating learning and the growth of the micro-business partners.

Apart from providing essential operation and maintenance services to the public sector authorities who are short of skills, the partnerships create jobs, provide training and on-the-job learning, and nurture micro-entrepreneurs. Future pilots and projects must be structured in a way that when they come to an end, the micro-business partners involved would have developed into sustainable entities, with the necessary skills and sufficient workload and income streams, to continue as viable businesses.

It is clear that the concept of social exchange partnerships for water services operation and maintenance can engage the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality, and fulfil the requirements of many of South Africa's national goals, notably:

- ensuring that every workplace is a learning space;
- job creation at the lowest economic levels where unemployment is highest and workplace skills very limited;
- micro-business creation and nurturing;
- Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment; and
- infrastructure and service delivery, through infrastructure maintenance activities that increase the quality and reliability of services, and the availability and utility of the infrastructure.

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# PAPER 11



# Inclusivity and the Accreditation of Workers' Education

*Ms Grischelda Hartman and Mr Leballo Tjemolane*

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## ABSTRACT

The historical context of education in South Africa presented unions with a particular responsibility and decision not only to transform access to education and skills development in the workplace, but also to transform (what was predominantly) non-formal workers' education into accredited workers' education programmes. The long-standing debate and question in the trade union movement, is whether workers' education should be accredited and whether the accreditation of workers' education creates hierarchies, to the exclusion of the majority. And if it is a means of career pathing/ development, if it thereby defeats the transformative and emancipatory objective of workers' education for the working class, or not? This paper will not attempt to answer these questions in their totality, but aims to give an engaging reflection on, and highlight the contribution of, the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education (Ditsela) in the space of accredited workers' education programmes. The paper further highlights some of the challenges experienced in the different programmes, and argues that whilst there is a higher demand for accredited programmes, the uniqueness and value of non-formal workers' education cannot be ignored and can stand firmly alongside any accredited programme.

## INTRODUCTION

Workers' education has historically played an influential role in workers' rigorous engagement with what was happening in society politically, socially, intellectually, economically, and spiritually, and continues to do so. Ditsela's role in the transformation and access to formal and non-formal education (that is, workers' education) in particular comes from a long history of political struggle and the recognition of trade union education. This paper will first consider the work that

Ditsela does, by reflecting on the context of its formation and the rationale that brought about the conceptualisation of its work. The paper will further attempt to explore the education provided by Ditsela through its accredited and learnership programmes, as part of its social transformation agenda with the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and, therefore, the broadening of workers' access to formal education. This exploration will be done through a closer look at the accredited and certificated programmes offered by Ditsela, which recognises workers' and trade union education as a means to address the inequalities created by a lack of access to further education.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY AND BACKGROUND**

Ditsela was officially launched as a joint venture by participating federations – the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) – and the Ministry of Labour on the 29 November 1996, to respond to the educational and organisational capacity development needs of the working-class. Ditsela is a *Section 21*, not-for-profit (NPO) organisation, core funded by the Department of (Employment and) Labour through its Strengthening Civil Society Fund, with project-specific funding from a Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) and the National Skills Fund (NSF). Ditsela formally started operating in January 1997, and *Ditsela Western Cape* was established in October 2000, through a merger with the Western Cape Workers' College.

Throughout its existence, Ditsela sought to be a space that engages with the complexity and importance of workers' education through the development and strengthening of workers' intellectual and organisational capacity in the workplace, industry and political democracy. Over the years, Ditsela has grown to become one of the leading providers of education, training and support services to the trade union movement in South Africa. Its reputation as a *labour institute* has also grown beyond the borders of South Africa.

Inspired by Paulo Freire's (2000: Chapter 4) idea that, "it is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation" – Ditsela seeks to involve workers actively in the process of their empowerment. This view is supported by Hamilton's (2014:241) argument that workers' education should be reclaimed as "politically emancipatory, in the interest of the working class and ideals of the workers' movements and should, therefore, continue to strive to bring about social transformation and enable participants to become critically conscious of the status quo".

## THE ACCREDITATION OF WORKERS' EDUCATION

"Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world" (Freire, 2000:34).

Hamilton (2014:230-231) suggests that there is no one concept or definition of what worker education is, and this has undoubtedly become a question for debate and research for both government policy-makers and researchers in universities. It is clear that there is complexity to workers' education, considering the state of the workers' movement, the influence of unions in directing education and policies, the state of the economy, workers' struggles, the close roots of workers' education to Adult Education, and its historical concern with social, political struggles, and personal and cultural development (Walters, 1997).

The critical role of workers' education – which was strongly argued by COSATU in particular – is that, "it should promote collectivism and working-class consciousness, should be emancipatory, creative, liberating and not be used for exploitation against workers" (Baatjes, Baduza and Sibiya, 2014:86-87). Further, it is "fluid and dynamic" (*Ibid.*:231). In essence, workers' education should be "for the purpose of raising class consciousness to support fundamental social

transformation" (*Ibid.*:241), and it is, therefore, critical that it should return to its historical radical pedagogy.

Cooper (2005), Cooper *et al.* (2002), and Vally (1994), suggest that there has been a significant shift in the delivery of workers' education. Firstly, it was a means to attain liberation and emancipation. It was about influencing the South African landscape of workers' education and training policies, and the new education system, in the transition to democracy. The authors argue that this focus has shifted the system priorities, forms of delivery, and the key target audiences of trade union education. It appears that there is a greater demand for workplace and skills training than there was previously. There is a focus on education that supports economic productivity and growth. Accredited learning programmes in general, and accredited shop stewards' training in particular, have "shifted the labour movement's understanding of knowledge production, the social purpose of education, and the meaning of workers' experience and its significance for learning" (Hamilton, 2014:232).

These changes, and the access of workers to education that either provides them with a certificate, or recognises their prior learning, are essential shifts for workers and worker development – as the debate around accredited and non-accredited courses in workers' education continues within the unions.

Some of the key objectives of Ditsela, captured in its mission statement, are to raise the profile and role of workers' education towards building a society based on socio-economic justice for the working class, and advocating for workers' education as an essential part of the adult learning policy discourse in the country, through building collaborative workers' education. The organisation seeks to achieve some of these through the recognition of workers' education; the provision of accredited programmes, and becoming an accredited provider; access for workers to institutions of higher learning, and building alliances with organisations with like-minded interests. Since its inception, Ditsela has formed strong linkages with labour service organisations, and units within universities

that have deep understandings of working-class ideologies, struggles and the labour movement.

Ditsela's approach to critical workers' education and basic political education is based on Oskar Negt's (1986) conceptualisation of 'societal competencies'. According to Negt (*Ibid.*), workers' education is the unfolding of critical thinking and understanding, with the view to changing society in the direction of a deepened democracy. This does not mean that the development of societal competencies is only based on the learning of a knowledge canon. On the contrary, the acquisition of knowledge concerning the societal competencies aims at the development of a person as a whole. Negt (*Ibid.*) further suggests that the ability of people to analyse their living and working conditions is, therefore, essential in understanding and critically questioning their roles in these contexts. Negt (*Ibid.*) argues for a radical conceptualisation of education, where education does not emerge in a neutral social space, but from within deeply contextualised realities. Learners in this context should thus view their development not in isolation, but in relation to what is happening globally, economically, socially and politically. Thus, the overall goal of workers' education is deeply rooted in a humanistic point of view that is often overlooked or denied in today's discourses on competencies (Negt, 2012:61).

## **A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF DITSELA'S FORMAL ACCREDITED QUALIFICATIONS/ PROGRAMMES**

Ditsela's approach to education is a combination of informal, non-formal and formal learning programmes. This paper discusses two formal qualifications that the organisation has developed over the years. These include:

- Ditsela's Advanced National Education Programme (DANLEP), which is offered in conjunction with different universities; and
- the Trade Union Practices Qualification (TUPQ), a learnership programme housed with the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA).

These programmes are designed to develop and capacitate the learner holistically and be a catalyst for transformation in the greater society. Ditsela's approach respects that learners are part of a greater society and can make constructive contributions to the project of social and economic transformation.

### ***The DANLEP programme***

The primary objectives of Ditsela's education programmes have always been to create a space where workers can interact across federations, develop and build critical thinking and understanding of the changing workplace and society, be able to respond to change, and engage in the political landscape.

The DANLEP programme was specifically developed as a critical leadership development initiative for the labour movement and community leaders, and to provide access for workers to Higher Education. The DANLEP programme, launched in 1998, was marked as Ditsela's flagship accredited Certificate/Diploma programme located in universities. The first DANLEP programme was developed by Ditsela in collaboration with unions, Labour Service Organisations (LSOs), university staff and others, and was offered through the University of the Witwatersrand's Society, Work, and Politics (SWOP) Institute, and the University of Cape Town (UCT) from 2003 to 2008. The end of the 2003-2008 National Skills Fund (NSF) funding cycle meant that Ditsela was unable to continue to offer this programme. However, there was an increased demand for it from the trade unions, and a funding request was made in 2011, for NSF funds for a four-year DANLEP programme on critical leadership development for the labour movement. The programme was relaunched in 2012 at UCT, and offered in 2013 and 2014 at the University of Western Cape (UWC) (Ditsela, 2011). Further intakes of learners in 2016 and 2017 graduated from UCT and UWC respectively, in 2018. There were no new learners for 2019, as Ditsela was developing five additional DANLEP courses at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 6.

The overall aims of the DANLEP programme are to develop theoretical knowledge, skills, the capacity of trade unionists to engage critically with the pertinent

issues of the day, and an understanding of the dynamics faced in leadership. These aims are addressed through programmes specifically designed for worker needs, using adult learning and popular education methodology. The DANLEP programme consists of six separate courses, namely, Labour Law, Leading and Managing Trade Unions, Organiser Skills Development, Political Economy of Labour, Educator Skills, and Women's Leadership Development. The courses were offered at NQF Level 5. The UWC Certificate carries 75 credits; the UCT Certificate, 120 credits.

The target audience for the DANLEP programmes are office-bearers, shop stewards and officials of trade unions, leaders or representatives from non-governmental or community-based organisations. The recruitment and applications for prospective participants are extended through invitations to the respective federations, trade unions and organisations, and applicants are invited to submit supplementary letters of motivation from themselves and their organisations. Selection is based on individuals' historical background of involvement in a trade union, experience and/or education, and either a school-leaving certificate, or RPL. Ditsela's approach – that it should not only determine the selection criteria of participants to the programme, but also be part of and ensure that the curriculum is worker-oriented and makes the transition into the academic space – has been a fluid and participatory learning experience. Ditsela also requires that facilitators or educators on the programme not only be sourced from academia, but also from the trade union movement and labour service organisations.

While there are strong views on whether workers' education should be located within institutions of higher learning, there are similarly strong views that workers' education might lose its identity within these spaces. There are further views that the formalisation of workers' education should not prejudice the value of experience, RPL, commitment to the working-class, and the struggles of the marginalised. Salt (2000:115) argues that the entry of workers into university for education creates a challenge, as education is perceived as a tool with which workers and their organisations can advance the class struggle against

the employer. He views this union-university relationship in the provision of education with some suspicion, as universities are also institutions that are responsible for the training of management and are representative of the capitalist class. In his opinion, “[f]irst, labour education is for workers, delivered by workers and should be facilitated and led by workers themselves, that labour education classroom dynamics promote ‘active learning’, acknowledging the value of participants’ trade union experience and build[ing] on this collective knowledge, and lastly their learning in their workplaces and unions” (*Ibid.*).

A strong argument should be made for the validity and value of experiential knowledge that should not be discarded in the absence or pursuit of formal qualifications. While formal knowledge will always exist and be dominant in institutions of higher learning, experiential knowledge/ learning should challenge this notion, including who teaches on the programmes (Moodley, Shah and wa Bofelo, 2016). It is not only within this context that the Workers’ College in KwaZulu-Natal locates its education programmes, but also within the critical Marxist theory and activist values which serve as bases for learners to engage critically with mainstream academia (Moodley *et al* 2016:82).

Learner selection for the DANLEP programme is on the basis of the roles that they play, or could potentially play, in their respective federations, as well as their prior knowledge and experiences in the workplace, home and community. The programme requires participants to participate in five face-to-face block-weeks in a year; and complete fieldwork assignments as well as group and individual class assignments, and exams. All of these allow for engagement with learners’ own and workplace experience. At the end of the programme, learners receive a Diploma or Certificate based on the criteria of the institution they attended.

### ***Evaluation of the DANLEP programme***

At DANLEP’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2008, it was reported that more than one thousand trade unionists had passed through the DANLEP programme. Ditsela’s (2013) tracer-study was commissioned to evaluate the experiences

of the 1999-2009 cohort of participants as a means to evaluate the relationship between education and training, the world of work, and the prospects and activities for participants. From the 2016/2017 cohort, 105 of 180 (58%) of the potential learners graduated, 87 from UWC and 18 from UCT respectively.

Each DANLEP course allows for a maximum of 30 candidates to participate; at times the numbers are slightly over- or slightly under-subscribed. Labour Law continues to be the most popular course and receives most of the applications. In terms of gender balance, men still appear to dominate in all the courses, with the Women's Leadership Development course having women only.

A 2015 study of women's experiences in the DANLEP programme found that the initiative was valued and needed by trade unions, in terms of building knowledge and critical thinking (Hartman, 2015). As in the earlier tracer-study (Ditsela, 2013), it was found that for many, it was the first time in a university programme, a new experience in workers' education, and the DANLEP programme was seen 'as the workers' university'. Importantly, the DANLEP experience ensured that learners linked their own experiences with what was being 'taught' in the classes. In terms of organisational and personal growth, many reported that they could use the skills and experiences within, and even after leaving, their trade unions (Hartman, 2015).

The challenges faced by Ditsela include the content becoming too academic and losing its working-class perspective. Ditsela should therefore guard what is being taught, and who teaches on the programme.

At the 2018 DANLEP graduation at UWC, Dinga Sikwebu – Head of Education at the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) – urged the 'new soldiers of workers' education' to use their newly-acquired knowledge to look beyond the shop floor, beyond employer-employee relations and said,

"if we are to truly re-imagine worker education and build international working-class power, then we must look at broader global issues .... How can we dream if the politics of exclusion continue; if the economy forces

us to compete rather than collaborate? We must talk about oppression in society and use our knowledge to tackle large-scale dehumanisation. We must relearn the actions of solidarity and empathy. And we must sow our new-found knowledge into the wind to ensure knowledge transfer” (Sikwebu, 2018).

The UWC Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Professor Tyrone Pretorius, also praised the Ditsela graduates – and the UWC-Ditsela alumni – for their perseverance in juggling a multitude of responsibilities as part-time adult students, to achieve their academic goals. He noted that universities were judged by the quality of their graduates. Also that for many, coming to UWC was their first entry into a university space, long after they had left school. He went on to explain that the DANLEP students were nominated by their unions, and selected based on the roles that they already played in their organisations and/or *could potentially play* in their communities. He emphasised that graduates are catalysts for change, that UWC believed in the transformative power of education, and that education is the gateway for ‘individuals and communities to transform their lives’.

### ***Trade Union Practice Qualification (TUPQ)***

The process of formally developing an NQF Qualification in Trade Unionism started as part of Ditsela’s Accreditation Action Research Project in 2001 (author unknown, Ditsela and Naledi, 2003:2). This research laid the foundation for engaging with the process of accrediting trade union education, and beginning the consultation with unionists on the viability of such a qualification. There were robust debates and arguments for and against accreditation, mostly to ensure the protection of trade union values and traditions.

The key findings of this report (*Op.Cit.*) included the need for access to qualifications for trade union members, to address the lack of educational opportunities and build the capacity of these members while remaining relevant to their daily activities (*Ibid.*:4). In 2005, Ditsela started a process towards developing the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) in Trade Union Practice

Qualification (TUPQ), with a consultative study to determine its feasibility. This project was commissioned by the ETDP SETA and undertaken by the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), while Ditsela provided prior research and oversaw the debates within the labour movement, on accreditation.

A historic conference on 12-13 July 2006, convened by the four major federations of the time<sup>118</sup>, different labour service providers and other interested parties, focused on the long-standing debate around the accreditation of trade union education. According to the resulting Joint Statement of the four federations (CONSAWU, COSATU, FEDUSA, NECTU, 2006:10-11), it was essential to clarify the developmental process of the Trade Union Practice Qualification because of “the importance of engaging every challenge as a site of workers’ struggles for influence and development”. The statement (*Ibid.*) highlighted the principles of worker control, improving the social and economic conditions of workers and the poor, and education as being central for addressing the imbalances in society (*Ibid.*). In addition, the statement reinforced the position of maintaining the ideological values and traditions of trade union education, noting the dangers of maintaining the balance between accredited education and worker education (*Ibid.*:12).

Under the auspices of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)<sup>119</sup>, a team of representatives from the federations was set up to develop and design the Unit Standards for this qualification, and a year later the ‘FETC: TUPQ’ was registered by SAQA on the NQF, to be quality assured by the ETDP SETA. In 2007, Ditsela applied for institutional accreditation with the ETDP SETA, and after the required independent inspection in February 2008, provisional accreditation was granted pending further work to be undertaken in developing policy guidelines for RPL, moderation and assessment, and for Ditsela’s existing materials to be aligned with the qualification. Ditsela was granted the status

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<sup>118</sup> COSATU, FEDUSA, NACTU and the Confederation of South African Workers’ Unions (CONSAWU).

<sup>119</sup> SAQA is mandated, through the NQF Act No. 67 of 2008 (and previously the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995), to oversee the implementation and further development of the NQF in South Africa.

of 'lead provider' for this qualification, given its reputation within the labour movement.

From the start, the FETC: TUPQ was envisaged as an important developmental vehicle for Ditsela as an organisation moving into the field of formal education; its DANLEP programme also played a key role in this shift. The FETC: TUPQ curriculum materials were, for Ditsela, this first developed according to the SAQA and ETDP SETA guidelines. This work required physical and human resources that Ditsela did not have (TUPQ Learner Guide, 2017:11-2). This lack of resources remains one of Ditsela's challenges, as delivery of the programme requires considerable time and human capital. The significance of the qualification is that it was developed based on the needs of trade unionists and the labour movement, for the trade union members and community activists, using participatory methodologies.

The FETC: TUPQ, an NQF Level 4 qualification, was developed around 2009 (Nzimande, 2014:4). The course is divided into nine modules. One of the modules covers the Fundamentals (Communication and Mathematical Literacy), and the completion of a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), Logbook, and reflective journal. The other eight modules are: (1) How trade unions work; (2) Introduction to Political Economy; (3) Labour Law as an Organising Tool; (4) Organising and Mobilising Workers; (5) Women's Oppression and other Forms of Oppression; (6) Building Effective Organisations; (7) Media and Communication; and (8) Collective Bargaining.

This qualification is a 'Learnership' at the level of school Grade 12. It is registered with the ETDP SETA in line with the Learnership model in which 70% of the learning takes place in the workplace, and 30% through facilitated contact or classroom sessions. The learners must complete formative and summative assessments in accordance with the Unit Standards of the qualification. The political and/or community organisations in which the participants are based are deemed as workplaces. Each learner must have a mentor to provide guidance and support; the mentors are inducted by Ditsela. For organisational support,

an Interim Federation Task Team (IFTT) was set up to maintain communication between the various role-players, provide guidance to the Programme Co-ordinator, and ensure that updated reports are provided on the progress of the programme.

On completion of the qualification, the learners should be able to apply their learning and competencies in their work in the unions/ community organisations, to promote and protect the rights of workers. These skills are developed by, amongst others, building participant knowledge and understanding of the politics of the economy, gender dynamics, and the history of the trade union movement in South Africa and internationally.

The programme was first piloted in Gauteng Province in 2011, with 50 learners of whom 37 attained the full qualification (150 credits). Of the second intake in 2014, 38 learners achieved the full qualification, and of the 2018 intake, 30 of 39 learners did so. In the Western Cape Province, another of South Africa's nine provinces, the first intake of 30 learners was in the 2017/2018 year; 19 learners obtained the full qualification and four, partial qualifications, in this cohort. The Western Cape had a second intake of 31 learners in 2019.

Part of the success of this learnership lies in individual participants' determination, and the guidance provided by their mentors. In addition to offering the qualification itself, it was important to include access routes through RPL. Many trade unionists have extensive knowledge of, and experience in, the work they do, although they might not have the 'papers' to prove it. The RPL process provides a systematic way of acknowledging participants' experience achieved in different contexts, and in so doing enables access to specific qualifications, or makes possible the awarding of credits for the whole qualification or part of it. The provision of RPL signals the first real step to providing worker-friendly access to an NQF-registered qualification.

Ditsela's approach to RPL includes the development of a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE). In the pilot phase of the FETC: TUPQ, learners were introduced to a

Portfolio Development Course (PDC) that was developed with the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) at UWC as an integral part of the Learnership. The purpose of the PDC was to assist learners in navigating their way through the Learnership, and developing a learning portfolio to document prior learning as well as new learning from the programme. At the beginning of the programme, learners who did not have the formal qualifications at NQF Level 3 were allowed to prepare a PoE through which they could gain access into the programme. The Fundamentals module is an integral part of the Learnership; learners must provide evidence that they will be able to cope with this work at NQF Level 4.

### ***Evaluation of the TUPQ programme***

The evaluation of Ditsela's work, and listening to what learners have to say, is an integral part of participatory adult learning processes. These processes must reflect in noticeable changes in Ditsela's work, and "measure its political effectiveness" (Casey, 1988:24-32).

Any challenges that learners and/or Ditsela as an organisation experience are identified in evaluations at the end of each module and the reports submitted to the ETDP SETA. The FETC: TUPQ is an extensive and intensive programme, offered over a year-and-a-half, and comprising contact time and workplace learning that includes workplace visits, assessments, moderation, and internal and external verification. The evaluations of the Gauteng and Western Cape Ditsela learners' and coordinators' reports are analysed. The Gauteng intake covers learners from across the country, while the Western Cape programme makes provision predominantly for learners from the Western Cape – it is not a residential programme.

Some of the challenges confronting Ditsela in both programmes included delays in starting and completing the programme within the funding period. This difficulty is linked to an integrated recruitment process that requires the representation of all federations in Ditsela's constituency. The delays result in the compression of the programme, with the spaces between contact sessions becoming narrower

and affecting learners' ability to implement their learning and complete their assessments in time. As the programme is quite resources-intensive, it would have been advisable to include more learners in any given cohort, than the number agreed. Further, the Western Cape learners were disadvantaged by the programme not being residential, which would have enabled them to finalise assessments after hours, work together in syndicates, and spend more time with the facilitators during the contact sessions. These difficulties were especially apparent in the Fundamentals module, which is compacted into one week that includes portfolio building. The 2016/2017 cohort in the Western Cape struggled especially, to complete their assessments. The proposal was that this module be split into two parts – and the impact of separating Communication and Mathematical Literacy is visible for the Western Cape group of learners whose submissions of assessments have improved markedly.

As for the DANLEP programme, learner selection principles are key. Prior learning and having been on union education programmes assisted learners who had left school some 20-30 years previously, and were seeking to enter the academy for the first time. The FETC: TUPQ requires the completion of some academic work as well as the implementation of workplace learning, coupled with responsibilities in the workplace and at home; hence, union qualifications can become intensive for adult learners. Ditsela has experienced relatively high dropout rates, which could be ascribed to a lack of employer (union) intervention and/or support, a lack of support from the mentors, a lack of time for studying, or other factors.

Learners coped fairly well with the different modules, but the biggest request came for the review of the delivery methodology of the Fundamentals (Maths Literacy and Communication) module as it presented Ditsela with the most challenges in the whole programme; for example, delayed feedback to learners, excessive amount of assessments, and too compact for one week. Whilst Ditsela should ensure that the number of assessments meet the outcomes and requirements of the Unit Standards, it should not be regarded and experienced

as a burden to learners. Where possible more work should be done by Ditsela in terms of how to measure and review assessments, and where possible to integrate more cross-referencing and practical work (workplace learning). Some modules have excessive assessments; this results in late submissions and learners feeling that they cannot cope with the workload, and this infringes on the time to give feedback and for reassessments. The delay from facilitators giving feedback has also been a challenge, and this affected resubmission when necessary. As not all facilitators are assessors, this has strained Ditsela staff.

Unions have also given greater consideration to their selection of learners for the programme, and those that will mentor them. The transference of knowledge and experience is palpable: several new learners selected former learners as their mentors. This process suggested a positive reinforcement of the programme. The unions have also addressed the gender balance of learners; in the 2017/2018 year for example, the Western Cape intake was 67% male and 33% female. The corresponding 2019 intake comprised 52% female learners, and 48% males. There is also a more balanced spread of younger and older participants. There are implications and tacit changes perhaps – for the labour movement and the world of work – from the improvements in these statistics.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There seems to be a higher learner demand for accredited programmes, and the funding of accredited programmes, than non-accredited ones. However, the labour movement must guard against relying on, and taking all its education to, institutions of higher learning. The labour movement must also challenge the assumption that only some forms of education are valued, as discussed in the paper. The labour movement must continue to place lived experiences, non-formal, and non-accredited workers' education firmly alongside the formal and accredited programmes, to enhance the academic curriculum.

The success and completion of programmes in institutions of higher learning

is measured based on competences, and learners are deemed competent or otherwise based on their measurable performance. In Ditsela's learning programmes, learners are similarly assessed. Ditsela, however, views the competency of a person differently. Participants in Ditsela's non-formal programmes have proven to be as successful, or even more so, than those in formal programmes. As a country with the historical exclusion of the predominantly Black working-class people from education, the access to education is viewed as central in transformation, and improving work and personal lives. Research has generally shown that although trade union education contributes to social development and transformation it cannot be achieved on its own; a receptive trade union organisation is needed to facilitate the continued development of people and society.

While working-class people continue to be excluded from education (be it formal or informal), the labour movement must drive the access of the working-class to institutions of Higher Education, and institutions that provide workplace learning. As such, the agenda must be in the interests of the working-class and social transformation.

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# **INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**



# PAPER 12



# Making Learning Pathways More Flexible: Validation in Europe

*Professor Dr Godelieve Van den Brande*

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## ABSTRACT

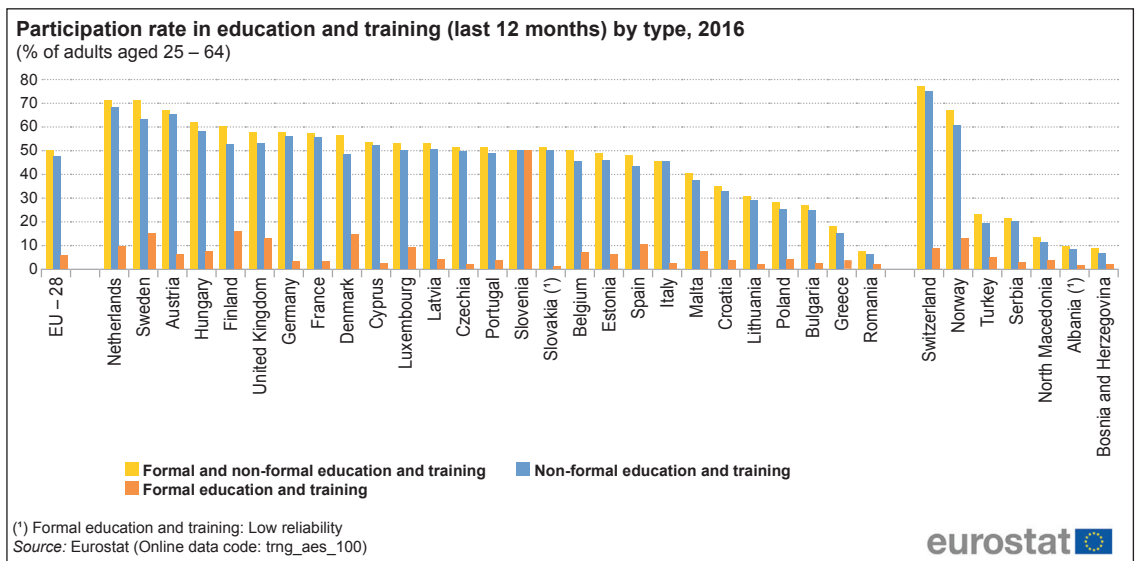
Validation of non-formal and informal learning is high on the European agenda. It forms an important element in lifelong and life-wide skills development in the learning chain. Validation is an instrument for each individual to use, to make all prior learning visible and valued. However, what we learn outside school often remains unrecognised or invisible. The 2012 European Union (EU) Recommendation is a major milestone in European policy-making around validation of informal and non-formal learning. In the 2012 EU Recommendation, all EU countries promised to put in place national arrangements for validation, by the end of 2018. This paper builds on the existing experiences of the validation of non-formal and informal learning at national and European levels; the European Inventory outcomes; the once-off reports presented by the individual EU countries; the stakeholders' discussions at the EU Validation Festival (2018), and the Third (3<sup>rd</sup>) Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) Biennale (2019). It provides a state-of-the-art overview of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and identifies the main trends and critical challenges. The paper focusses on the role of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, for inclusion. As highlighted by the European Commission (EC) in the European Social Pillar, and in the New Skills Agenda; and as implemented under the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework for European Cooperation – people should be able to use the full ranges of their skills, including those acquired in non-formal and informal way, in their careers and further learning.

## INTRODUCTION

Let us start with a rhetorical question to the readers: 'Think of the last time you learnt something important. Most of you might have thought of something you

learnt at work from a colleague, or at home reading, or maybe during a course organised by your employer or at a language academy. But for sure, very few thought of learning in a formal setting: school or university that leads to a formal qualification?'

'Real' lifelong learning is about more than adding formal training and courses to your curriculum vitae. We also learn in non-formal ways, out of interest but without an approved syllabus, and even informally, through experience but without the deliberate intention to acquire knowledge. Non-formal learning by adults counts for 42% of learning, *versus* only 3% for formal education in the European Union (EU) (EC/Eurostat, 2016).



**Figure 1: Participation rate in education and training in Europe, 2016 (EC/Eurostat, 2016)**

However, what we learn outside school often remains unrecognised or invisible. The validation of informal and non-formal learning is, therefore, high on the European agenda. We say that skills are 'validated' when a competent body confirms that they meet certain standards. This process includes several phases: the identification of the skills, their documentation, their assessment, and their certification. The last phases can lead to a qualification or part of a qualification.

## ***Validation high on the European agenda***

For decades in Europe, there was and remains increasing attention to the validation of informal and non-formal learning both from the side of practice as well as policy. The EU engages in policy activities to acknowledge alternative ways of learning. In addition, various pilot projects and policy experimentations are underway through the *Erasmus+* programme<sup>120</sup> at work, in education and training, lifelong learning, and the youth sector. A vast number of EU Member States have taken concrete steps to provide each individual with the opportunity to show and prove all the types of learning acquired in their lives, including that beyond formal education.

Building further on existing bottom-up practices and initiatives, the European Commission (EC) launched, in 2012, a major European policy initiative around validation of informal and non-formal learning. The 2012 Council Recommendation aimed at providing people with opportunities to validate the skills they develop outside school, college or university, e.g. in the workplace or volunteering.

The impact of these policies can be significant in better matching skills and labour demands, promoting the transferability of skills between companies and sectors, and supporting mobility across the European labour market. The policies can also contribute to fighting social exclusion by providing a way to improve the employability of early school leavers, unemployed individuals, adults with low-level skills, third-world country nationals, and other groups at risk.

The Recommendation provides a number of principles for the European-wide implementation of validation arrangements. It refers to the various fundamental values of validation, which all come together in two main principles. First, all learning, irrespective of where and when it takes place, is valuable for the

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<sup>120</sup> The Erasmus+ is the European programme for education, training, youth and sport – it aims to modernise education, training, and youth work across Europe. In it, organisations can apply for funding each year, for life-changing activities.

individual and society. Thus, validation is about making visible the diverse and rich learning of individuals. This learning frequently takes place outside formal education and training – at home, in the workplace or through leisure-time activities – and is commonly overlooked and ignored. Secondly, non-formal and informal learning complement, and work together with, formal learning. Validation is about attributing value to the learning of individuals, irrespective of the context in which it took place. Validation is not a substitute for (formal) education and training. Validation adds to, and works together with, the learning that takes place in schools, Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions, and universities. Accepting these two principles is crucial for truly developing validation that works.

The EC and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) assist the EU Member States in this process. The *European Guidelines on Validation* (EC, 2016b) provide policy and practical advice to the Member States and stakeholders seeking to implement validation. The 2018 updated *European Inventory* (Cedefop, 2018) provides a unique record on the use of validation at national, regional and local levels in Europe, illustrated by hundreds of good practice examples. It further contains thematic analyses of key issues relating to the design and implementation of validation initiatives. These national reports, together with multiple cases, thematic and international studies, are a rich source of information to support the dialogue and peer learning between the different stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe and across the world.

The 2012 EU Recommendation is a major milestone in European policy-making for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. In the Recommendation, all EU countries promise to put in place national arrangements for validation by the end of 2018. The once-off national reports (Portal for Learning Opportunities and Qualifications in Europe [PLOTEUS], 2019) are under discussion at the European Qualifications Advisory Group that represents the EU Member States. The year 2019 is, therefore, an important year in the work of the EU on the validation of non-formal and informal learning

– both in terms of the progress made across the EU countries, as well as looking at the next steps for the way forward. By the end of 2019, the EC will publish an evaluation of the EU Recommendation. Part of this evaluation draws on wide public consultation for the collection of information and the opinions of stakeholders and the public in general. The results of this consultation will inform future EU decisions in the area of validation. As 2019 is also the year of the installation of a new Commission, it is a critical moment to reflect on both the past and the future.

Building on the existing experiences at national and European levels, the European Inventory outcomes, the once-off reports (*Op. Cit.*) presented by the individual EU countries, the stakeholders' discussions at the EU Validation Festival (2018), and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) Biennale (2019), a number of trends and critical challenges can be identified. This paper discusses in particular, the trends with a specific focus on the role of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, for inclusion. As highlighted by the EC in the European Social Pillar and the New Skills Agenda, and implemented in the form of the Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework for European Cooperation, people should be able to use the full ranges of their skills for their careers and further learning – including what they acquired in non-formal or informal ways.

### ***Stakeholder engagement through bottom-up practices***

The European Inventory on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) (Cedefop *et al* 2019) describes a substantial increase in validation policies and practices at national, regional and local levels in Europe since 2012. The overall picture emerging from data collected for the Inventory shows an increasing interest and participation of stakeholders in the education sector. A fair degree of progress has also been made in the labour market but, while it is acknowledged that some progress has been made, further efforts by European countries are needed concerning the 'third sector', representing, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), youth organisations, civil society

organisations, and others. The considerable interest of stakeholders in sharing practices and exchanging ideas at the EU Validation Festival on 14-15 June 2018 in Brussels<sup>121</sup>, as well as at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> VPL Biennale of 2017 and 2019<sup>122</sup>, illustrate the increasing engagement of bottom-up practices. Also, through the Erasmus+ programme and the European Social Fund, various pilot projects, networks and policy experiments are underway – at work, in education and training, lifelong learning, and the youth sector.

These bottom-up initiatives reveal that the landscape of stakeholders involved in validation is steadily growing but also diverse, fragmented and complex. Every country identified (a minimum of) between 10 and 30 stakeholders involved in delivering the elements of the validation arrangements. These stakeholders have a mix of roles, including providing funding, outreach and/or providing intelligence. Governmental organisations were particularly dominant in the functions of coordination (European Inventory – Cedefop *et al* 2019). Education and training providers are key stakeholders with respect to the different stages of validation: identification and documentation, assessment, and certification, along with Public Employment Services (PES) and national organisations.

National organisations were consistently involved in a large range of functions in over a quarter of EU countries, but they were particularly involved in the setting up of standards and certification. The results also suggest that social partners (chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts; employer organisations; trade unions) tend to be involved in standards' setting and assessment, and that a range of stakeholder types have relatively significant roles in the provision of information and guidance, identification and documentation. In the third sector, there was limited involvement concerning most types of stakeholders. However, governmental organisations played a considerable role in the coordination and design of national strategies in this

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<sup>121</sup> This information was accessed on 30 November 2019, at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=88&eventsId=1314>

<sup>122</sup> This information was accessed on 30 November 2019, at: <https://vplbiennale.org/>

sector. Youth organisations and other civil society organisations were involved in a significant way, in providing information, advice and guidance, and in identification and documentation.

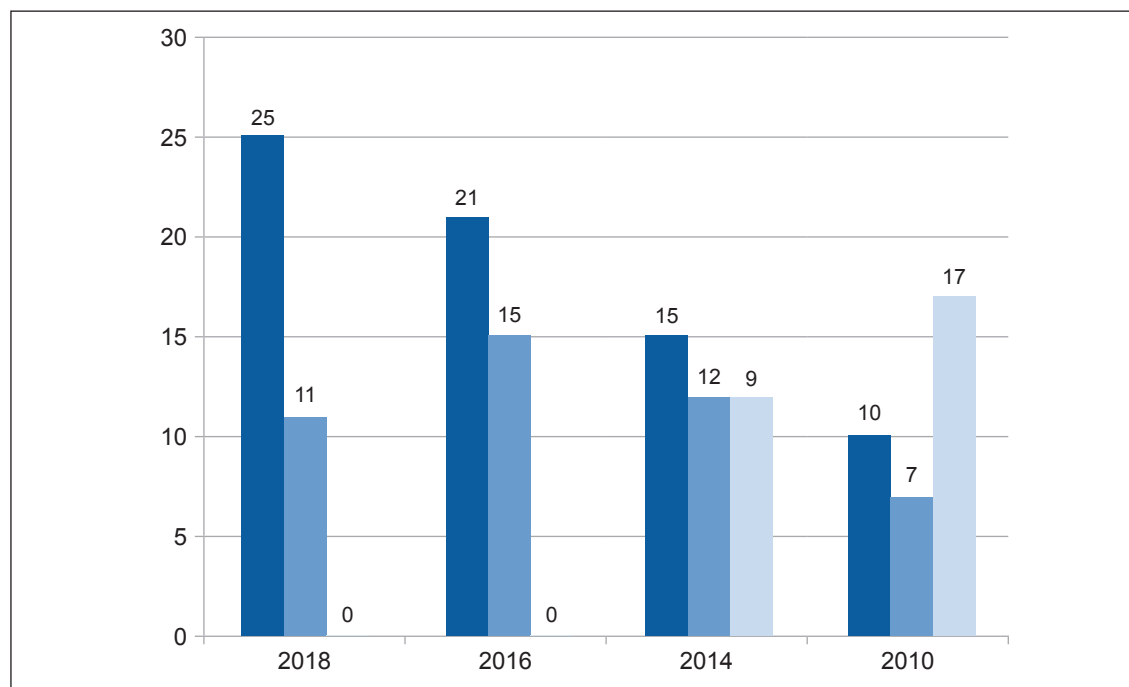
A large number of stakeholders are thus involved in validation, but are not well coordinated. However, the first signs of structuring in the domain and community around validation are visible in Europe. Stakeholders wish to enhance and accelerate the community building around the validation of informal and non-formal learning. There is a wish to structure and upscale connections (locally, nationally, at European level) between all validation actors and to create a shared space that allows actors to build bridges, share good practices and success stories, and learn from diversity (Flash Report on EU Validation Festival, 2019:2).

### ***How has validation been implemented in Europe?***

The 2012 Recommendation had a major positive impact, both in developing national policy strategies for establishing validation arrangements, and sharing validation policies and practices between the EU countries through the European Qualifications Advisory Group. However, the system needs further efforts, especially in making validation more comprehensive and developing practitioners' skills and competences (Geleng and Villalba, 2019).

The updated European Inventory (Cedefop *et al* 2019) describes steady development over the last decade and the commitment of Member States to the agenda of the 2012 Council Recommendation on validation. In 2019, validation arrangements were in place in at least one sector of education, work, or third sector in 35 of the 36 countries involved. This number had remained stable since 2016, although it represents a significant increase since 2010 when there were 26 of 34 such countries. Validation arrangements existed most commonly in the education sector; arrangements were also in place in the labour market in 19 countries, while in the third sector, they were in place in 23 countries. Since 2010, there has been a clear increase in the number of countries with

strategies in place or under development (e.g. legal frameworks, strategies or policies). By 2010, 17 countries were reported as having no validation strategy; by 2018, all 36 countries studied had, or were developing, some type of validation strategy.



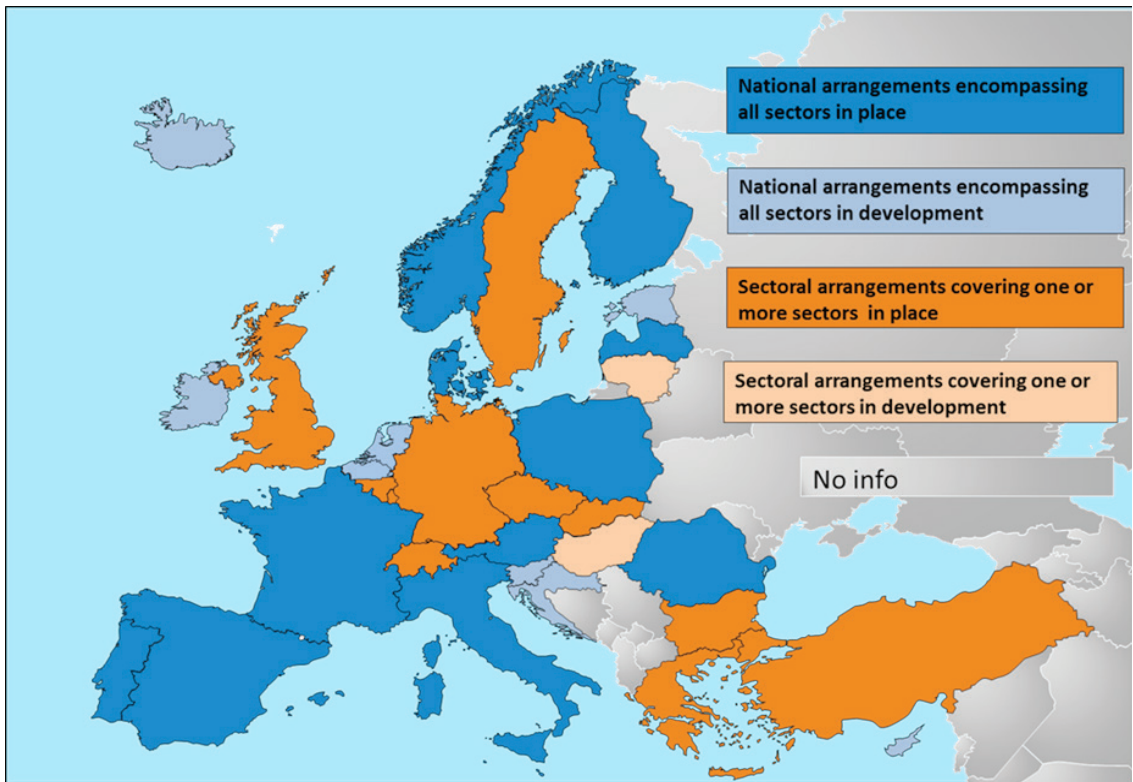
**Figure 2: Numbers of countries with validation arrangements, 2010-2018**  
(Source: European Inventory - Cedefop, 2018, 2010; Cedefop *et al* 2016; EC *et al* 2014)

Key:

Dark blue = education sector; middle blue=labour market; light blue=third sector

Countries adopt different approaches to implementing the validation of non-formal and informal learning. While some countries have established national arrangements (e.g. legal frameworks, strategies or policies) that encompass all sectors, others adopt sectoral approaches in which the arrangements cover one or more sectors. The data (*Op.Cit.*) show that 20 countries had developed, or were in the process of developing *national* arrangements that encompassed all sectors. Sixteen countries had, or were in the process of developing only particular sectoral arrangements.

The European Inventory (Cedefop *et al* 2019) also looked into prioritised sectors with respect to the provision of public funding or developing policies/regulations for validation. In 27 of the 35 countries (or three-quarters of the countries with validation arrangements in place), validation was prioritised in at least one education sub-sector. In 11 out of 19 countries that reported validation arrangements in their labour markets, validation was a priority in this sector. While in the third sector, validation was a priority in only five of the 23 countries reporting it in place. As reported in 2016, this trend shows that validation continues to link closely with the education sector. While validation had increased priority in the labour market initiatives, its prioritisation in the third sector remained uncommon.



**Figure 3: Map of types of validation arrangements in Europe, 2018 (Source: European Inventory – Cedefop, 2018; Cedefop *et al* 2016)**

## ***Increasing number of validation initiatives for inclusion***

Validation is not an isolated process; it addresses key societal challenges such as social exclusion, better matching skills and labour demands, promoting the transferability of skills between companies and sectors, and supporting mobility across the European labour market. The European Inventory research (Cedefop, 2018) showed that, within a landscape of generally increasing validation policy and practice in Europe, 19 EU countries – as opposed to 14 in 2016 – made validation initiatives available to, and targeted, disadvantaged groups such as young ‘NEETs’ (people not in education, employment or training), adults with low skills-levels, and job-seekers/ people at risk of unemployment.

It is clear that the recent attention of policy-makers to adults with low skills levels has been the result of European policies over the last few years. In June 2016, as part of the ‘New Skills Agenda for Europe’, the EC proposed setting up a ‘Skills Guarantee’ to address this challenge<sup>123</sup>. The initiative resulted in the Council Recommendation titled ‘Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults’, adopted on 19 December 2016. The Upskilling Pathways (Cedefop, 2019a) initiative specifically targets the 61 million adults in the EU with low levels of proficiency in basic skills, and/or who have, at most, a lower secondary education qualification<sup>124</sup>. These adults are less likely to participate in learning and face higher risks of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. The initiative is for those who are not eligible for the Youth Guarantee<sup>125</sup> support as they are over 25 years old. According to Eurostat (EC, 2017) data, 15.7% of low-qualified young Europeans aged 15 to 29 were not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared to 9.6% of their better-educated peers. In the same year, the

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<sup>123</sup> The Skills Guarantee aims to encourage upskilling pathways at the national level, with implementation and monitoring supported by the EC.

<sup>124</sup> Data sourced from Eurostat (2017), Figure: (edat\_lfs\_9901) entitled ‘Population by educational attainment level, sex and age’.

<sup>125</sup> The Youth Guarantee is a commitment by all EU Member States to ensure that young people under the age of 25 years receive quality offers of employment, continued education, apprenticeship, or traineeships. More information can be accessed at, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1079&langId=en>

unemployment rate of low-qualified adults of working age (25 to 64) stood at 13.9% in the EU-28<sup>126</sup> while that of their highly qualified peers was at 4.2%<sup>127</sup>.

The Upskilling Pathways Recommendation (2016C:484/01) suggests that Member States, “offer adults with [low levels] of skills, knowledge and competences ... access to upskilling pathways which provide them with [opportunities] according to their individual needs, to acquire ... [the] minimum level[s] of literacy, numeracy and digital competence ... and/or acquire ... wider set[s] of skills, knowledge and competences relevant for the labour market and active participation in society ... by making progress towards a qualification at European Qualifications Framework (EQF) Level 3 or 4, depending on national circumstances”. All Upskilling Pathways should comprise three steps, namely, (1) skills assessment, (2) “the provision of a tailored, flexible and quality learning offering”, and (3) “[the] validation and recognition of skills acquired” (*Ibid.*).

The stocktaking of measures taken by countries to deliver Upskilling Pathways (EC, 2019) describe interesting initiatives of tailored learning provisions aimed at supporting adults with low skills levels. For example in Portugal, the *Qualifica* programme provides validation and then signposts adults with low skills levels to up to 50 hours of complimentary training through a network of over 300 recognition-, validation- and certification of competence centres. A key strength of the service is its basis on close collaboration between local organisations such as social services, employers, third sector organisations, and local employability networks. In Belgium, the *Cité des Métiers* (City of Trades) is a ‘one-stop-shop’ for job seekers. It brings together career guidance, advice, and signposts to training and support to enable individuals to achieve their career aspirations. The Public Employment Service Forum has developed, through the *Step4-SFC* project<sup>128</sup>, a

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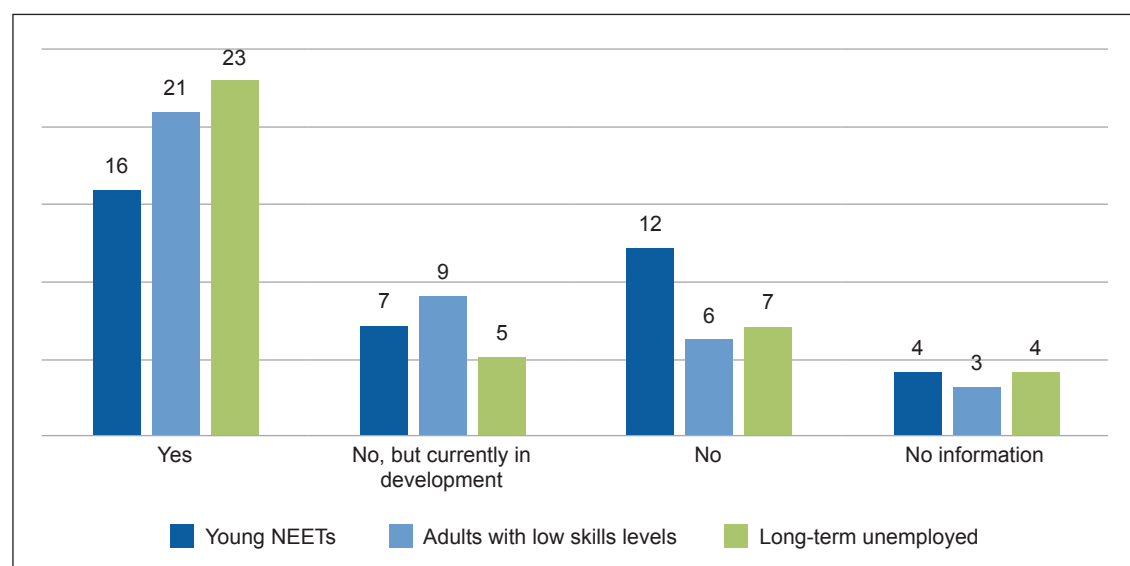
<sup>126</sup> The 28 countries in the EU.

<sup>127</sup> Data sourced from Eurostat (2017), Figures: (edat\_ifse\_21) and (ifsa\_urgaed). ‘Low-qualified’ are individuals with lower than upper secondary schooling, corresponding to International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Levels 0-2; in both examples, their knowledge and skills are compared with those of their peers with qualifications at ISCED Levels 5-8.

<sup>128</sup> SFC stands for *Savoir Faire Comportementaux*, which roughly translates to ‘professional behavioural skills’.

methodology to identify learners' professional behaviours. It has also produced a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on behavioural skills. The Netherlands will initiate learning budgets for adults who do not receive student grants and/or loans to help them to fund their education and training. The *Gardeners Programme* in Slovakia aims to develop Roma communities' basic and social skills through gardening courses.

While specific validation arrangements targeting disadvantaged groups are increasing in importance in Europe, these vary in degree and extent across the countries. Specific initiatives are most frequently in place for those who are unemployed in the long-term, followed by adults with low skills levels, and finally, young NEETs (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: Number of specific initiatives for young NEETs, adults with low skills levels, and people unemployed in the long-term, across all EU countries in 2019 (Source: European Inventory – Cedefop et al 2019)**

In 16<sup>129</sup> of the 39 examined countries in the European Inventory (Cedefop, 2019d), experts reported on validation initiatives that focus specifically on young

<sup>129</sup> Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, and the United Kingdom (UK).

NEETs. Currently, such schemes are under development in seven countries<sup>130</sup> while 12 countries<sup>131</sup> are yet to establish these. While the recognised schemes are diverse, the Youth Guarantee programme has been identified as a key tool and funding mechanism for the validation of informal and non-formal learning for young NEETs. This is the case, for example, in Latvia where the Youth Guarantee programme (funded under European Social Fund [ESF] for 2014-2018) includes the validation of informal and non-formal learning, amongst other activities. The validation process includes an initial skills audit, testing and certification. Similarly, various projects under the Youth Guarantee programme in Romania are addressing the validation for NEETs under the already existing validation framework and tools. Importantly, only one of the five countries with the highest youth unemployment rates<sup>132</sup>, Italy, has a validation scheme that specifically targets young NEETs, where validation is also through the Youth Guarantee programme. In 2012, the French government launched a dedicated initiative, *Emplois d'Avenir*<sup>133</sup>, which promotes validation in the form of subsidised jobs and training programmes. This initiative supports young people with low skills levels who face difficulties in accessing the labour market due to their lack of training or geographical disadvantage. It involves reciprocal commitments between the young person, the employer, and the public authorities likely to enable long-lasting inclusion of the person in professional life. Many EU countries, however, enable young people but without dedicated schemes. In Denmark and Slovenia, if a young person or adult are interested, they can access validation at specific education and training providers, especially VET schools. In Malta, validation is a general process that recognises learning that results from work experience, and is open to all.

Regarding validation for adults with low skills levels, the European Inventory (Cedefop *et al* 2019) suggests that most (21 of 28) of the EU countries have in

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<sup>130</sup> Cyprus, Czech, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, and Croatia.

<sup>131</sup> Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

<sup>132</sup> According to latest Eurostat (2017) data, these countries are: Greece, Spain, Italy, Croatia, and Cyprus.

<sup>133</sup> *Emplois de avenir* translates to 'future employment'.

place validation arrangements that target adults with low skills levels<sup>134</sup>, while nine countries<sup>135</sup> are currently developing initiatives. In France, a sizeable five-year Skills Investment Plan aims at upskilling, and returning to employment, one million 'low-qualified' unemployed adults, and one million young NEETs (European Commission, 2018). The Skills Investment Plan includes a number of actions to support adults with low levels of skills, knowledge and competences. The Ministry of Employment is negotiating agreements with regional councils to determine the financial contributions to support these actions. The previous Presidency implemented this initiative (*Pôle Emploi* and *Afpa*)<sup>136</sup> in collaboration with the regions, and included a national pilot programme to enable 10,000 people to use their right to '*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*' (VAE)<sup>137</sup> to obtain qualifications and find jobs. In period 2019-2022, the 'Pact' (a multi-annual plan) will include specific objectives related to validation and the development of tools (*référentiels de formation*)<sup>138</sup> that enable individuals to identify their skills in relation to occupation and training standards.

In Latvia, a five-year European Social Fund project that started in 2017, aims to improve adults' professional competences to increase their competitiveness as employees, and to promote productivity in workplaces. In this initiative, employed persons aged 25 years and above, have an opportunity, among others, to participate in non-formal education programmes and validate the knowledge, skills and professional competences they acquired outside formal education. In addition, the project envisages laying the foundation for a common and sustainable adult education support system in cooperation with local authorities.

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<sup>134</sup> Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

<sup>135</sup> Cyprus, Czech, Estonia, Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Italy, Croatia, and Poland.

<sup>136</sup> *Pôle Emploi* is a French government centre, established in 2009 through a merger of two other organisations. It registers unemployed people, helps them to find jobs, and provides financial aid. *Afpa* is learning association for the professionalisation of adult learners.

<sup>137</sup> In English, the accreditation of prior learning, which allows any French institution to grant Degrees in part or in full, based on the recognition of work experience.

<sup>138</sup> Training reference materials.

The VET qualifications obtained through validation in this initiative are used in the same ways as those achieved through formal education.

In Germany, the new initiative – ‘*ValiKom*’<sup>139</sup> – focuses on ‘low-skilled’ adults and aims to create opportunities for adults with work experience, to receive validation of their competences through practical tests. Trained staff implement the validation process. At the end of the procedure, the Chamber of Commerce, Chamber of Crafts or Chamber of Agriculture issues the certificate.

In countries where validation initiatives are currently under development, there is some groundwork in direct response to the Upskilling Pathways (2016) recommendation. This is, for example, the case in Cyprus, Italy and Greece. Concerning Greece, plans are underway to sign a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between EOPPEP (the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance – a validation authority) and OAED (the Manpower Employment Organisation of Greece – the Greek PES), to cover the third step of the Upskilling Pathways (validation). In Italy, the Ministry of Education took on the responsibility of promoting a thorough review preceding the implementation of the Upskilling Pathways initiative (Cedefop, 2019a), and activated a working platform on lifelong learning that brought together a wide range of stakeholders.

That the highest number of countries (23)<sup>140</sup> with validation schemes is dedicated to the ‘long-term unemployed’ people, suggests the socio-economic importance of supporting this group, and the magnitude of the challenge. Most of these countries established initiatives to address the long-term unemployment challenge effectively, and facilitate the return of people in this group, to work. In these initiatives, job seekers registered at the national public employment

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<sup>139</sup> *Valikom* is a German initiative for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; see further information about this scheme at: <https://www.validierungsverfahren.de/startseite/>

<sup>140</sup> Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom.

services are entitled to skills mapping services. This screening aims to identify job seekers' skills, knowledge and capabilities accurately to create an optimal match between these and the available occupational profiles (vacancies) or learning programmes. Furthermore, the screening helps to ensure that job seekers receive suitable assistance in preparation for their (re)integration into the labour market.

Regarding validation opportunities for migrants and refugees, eight EU countries<sup>141</sup> have systemic validation arrangements in place, or at least partly in place. Migrants and refugees were dominant users of validation in only four countries: Finland, Italy, Turkey and the Netherlands. In Finland and the Netherlands (countries with systemic arrangements in place), migrants and refugees are dominant user groups of validation in the Higher Education sector. In Italy and Turkey, validation opportunities for this group are available through project-based initiatives, primarily in the Continued Vocational Education and Training (CVET) sector. These findings suggest that migrants and refugees are not yet making much use of the validation opportunities across the different sub-sectors of education, the labour market and the third sector. Moreover, many initiatives focus on the highly qualified/ skilled newcomers and not on those with low skills levels, or those who are vulnerable (e.g. disabled people, women, and unemployed or under-employed migrants/ refugees).

### ***Enabling conditions and challenges***

Against the backdrop of an improving validation landscape and increasing efforts to create opportunities for young NEETs, adults with low skills levels, and people unemployed in the long term, there is still a lot of work to do. The documentation provided by the 2018 European Inventory on validation, as well as the once-off reports (PLOTEUS, 2019) presented to the European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group, and the discussions at the 2018 EU Validation Festival, identified

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<sup>141</sup> Austria, Belgium-Wallonia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Sweden.

key challenges and barriers. It is up to the validation community and policy-makers to develop proper responses to these issues.

### ***Putting the focus on the individual***

The principles that the individual should be at the centre of his/her own learning pathway and that validation must be able to cater for the diverse needs of different individuals, are central in the thinking of European validation policies and practices. The purpose of validation is to empower people and make skills visible and valuable for whatever purpose (Flash Report on the EU Validation Festival, 2019:2). Validation – identifying what a learner knows, and can understand – clarifies the real starting point of further learning and work. Validation helps to focus on positive achievements, avoiding unnecessary repetitions and expensive loss of time and money. The individual is central. Each individual has his/her own personalised learning journey made up of a combination of formal-, non-formal- and informal learning. However, looking at the wealth of the local, regional and national initiatives and practices, some questions remain. Where is the learner? How do learners access the validation support facilities? Do learners benefit from validation services, and how do they make use of these? These questions demand an improvement in the advocacy of validation.

Most EU countries reported challenges in engaging individual learners, particularly adults with low skills levels from disadvantaged or hard-to-reach groups, including the NEETs, migrant people, and those in rural communities). To address these challenges, the delegates a 2018 Mutual Learning Workshop on Upskilling Pathways proposed:

- (i) using organisations that work specifically with certain target groups to undertake outreach (advocacy and communication) to groups such as local community groups;
- (ii) creating a single-entry points for adults with low skills levels to access support, to simplify the landscape for this group;
- (iii) ensuring that initiatives that support Upskilling Pathways are framed positively to make them more attractive for learners; and

- (iv) ensuring that existing provision is linked more clearly, to create coherent pathways.

### ***The interconnection of validation and guidance***

Individuals should be able to receive support if needed to understand and access the benefits of validation, starting with the identification of learning in their everyday experiences. The European Inventory (Cedefop *et al* 2019) also recognised that guidance services were crucial in supporting validation. Validation and guidance are thus interconnected. No adequate validation of learning is possible without counselling and advice, and good quality guidance needs to include the validation of acquired learning. The key question is, 'How can guidance and validation work together coherently?'

### ***Validation to support lifelong and life-wide learning pathways***

Validation is not a stand-alone tool. Validation forms an important element in lifelong and life-wide skills development in the learning chain; it is part of the lifelong learning landscape. Its potential of validation can only be realised if defined as part of a 'lifelong learning chain'. Validation is an instrument for each individual to use, to make prior learning visible and valued. As such, validation is not particularly for certain groups of individuals, or connected solely with the education, employment or the third sectors. It serves the needs of individuals. It needs to work coherently with a broader range of policies and initiatives. Key questions are, 'To what extent is the lifelong learning chain operationalised? What is required for such operationalisation to take place?'

The recent findings from the European Inventory (Cedefop *et al* 2019) showed that validation occurred mostly in the education sector, followed by the employment sector, and then the third sector. If lifelong and life-wide learning are to become realities, validation must be an integral building block of education and training, employment and social policies. Validation should be a tool for bridging education, training and employment policies and practices. Validation

cannot be the responsibility of education alone; it requires the involvement and commitment of labour market authorities and civil society organisations at different levels. However, how to connect these diverse worlds is still a challenge. Validation also requires the involvement and commitment of employers as well as trade unions to play roles in wider lifelong learning contexts. A key question is, 'How does one engage employers and other labour market actors, notably social partners, in validation arrangements, and how does one create bridges between the labour market and education?' In addition, validation benefits from the active involvement of the third sector, for example, in volunteering and youth. Another key is thus, 'How does one mobilise civil society in taking forward validation?' Social policies and partners need to integrate validation, particularly to address the needs of individuals at risk. A key question in this instance is, 'How does one reach out to individuals, especially those with skills and few qualifications, to encourage them to engage in validation processes?'

The closer involvement of employers and strong bridges between education and work are required urgently. How achieve these? How position validation in the wider landscape of learning and work? Stakeholders from the labour market; education and training; non-formal education and civil society; and Higher Education, research and innovation need to be brought together to develop national strategies on skills, which feature validation (Flash Report on the EU Validation Festival, 2019:2). The involvement of all of these stakeholders is, therefore, crucial for any success in validation policies and practices. Such close cooperation could help to build trust and ownership among stakeholders, and to maintain the diversity of the offerings and outreach to potential candidates. Exploiting new technologies (i.e. open badges, e-portfolios, Blockchain) and digitisation could reach more individuals and make validation more attractive for all stakeholders, including employers. Operating together (notably) with guidance services in education and employment, validation is there to facilitate lifelong and life-wide learning, building on what has been achieved in formal education but making use of the experiences gained at home, at work, in volunteering, and elsewhere (Flash Report on the EU Validation Festival, 2019:2).

## ***Trusting validation***

Validation strongly relies on the idea of measurement of the validated knowledge and/or skills against standards, and that the same learning outcomes acquired in different ways or settings are equally valuable. The different institutions and individuals must trust the results of a validation process; there must be proof of the learning outcomes achieved. The effective implementation of validation requires trust. One of the underlying reasons for the lack of trust is the fact that certificates obtained through validation are (look) different to those given in formal education, and are thus not seen as equal. A total of 24 (69% of) countries had at least one education sub-sector where the certificates obtained through validation were not differentiated from those acquired through formal education – a small increase compared to 2016 (with 66% of countries). In nine countries, this was the case for all sub-sectors with validation arrangements in place (European Inventory – Cedefop *et al* 2019). It is possible to know that a certificate resulted from a validation process, from the manner of presentation of the grades, or the completion times.

For policy-makers and stakeholders to prioritise and allocate for validation, a basic level of trust is required. A key question is, 'How does one ensure that policy-makers and stakeholders see validation as a sufficiently trustworthy alternative to traditional learning routes? For individuals, validation arrangements must make clear that key requirements such as reliability, validity and quality assurance, are met. Another key question is, 'How does one generate sufficient trust for individual users to want to seek validation?'

## ***Design of validation arrangements***

The learning outcomes approach is an indispensable enabling factor for validation arrangements, in particular, when formal assessment and certification take place. The introduction of learning outcomes-based qualification standards signal that the same outcomes can be achieved in different ways and be the result of learning in different settings (EC, 2012). The general shift to learning

outcomes during the last decade opens qualifications to a wider range of learning experiences with the same currency value, including those acquired in non-formal and informal learning. A key question is, 'How does one enhance this shift to learning outcomes in order to allow the validation route to qualifications as indicated?'

Member States of the EU have now developed, and are implementing, national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) based on learning outcomes referenced to the EQF. The development of validation arrangements has been linked to NQF implementation. The inclusion of qualifications acquired outside formal education, and provided by other learning and training providers, in national qualifications frameworks, is still limited. Another key question is, 'How will non-formal learning that leads to a certificate, be connected to NQFs?'

### ***The professionalisation of validation***

The 2012 EU Council Recommendation on validation and the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning point to a need for the further development of the role of validation practitioners, notably that related to guidance and assessment. A key question is, 'How does one promote the professionalisation of validation practitioners?' The further professionalisation of practitioners has potential to contribute to assuring the quality of validation and generate more trust. Quality assurance mechanisms have to take into account the specificities of the validation process in terms of assessment methods, guidance and certification. A key related question is, 'How specific should quality assurance mechanisms be in validation?'

There is a clear need for statistical data and the monitoring of validation practices. Impact studies and in-depth research are also missing in the area of validation. A key question in this regard is, 'How does one best support further research at national and European levels, taking account of ongoing work such as the European Inventory and the European Guidelines?' The European Inventory (Cedefop *et al* 2019) shows that there are positive signs for building a

community of validation practitioners and professionals in Europe. A key question here is, 'How can this community be strengthened further, both nationally and at the European level?'

### ***The financing of validation***

For validation to reach individual learners where they live, work and learn, predictable and sustainable sources of funding have to be agreed to. The financing of validation will depend on the way that validation arrangements have been organised in each country, as well as on the context, existing financial structures, and traditions. Estimating costs is one challenge. Another is identifying the benefits, both economic and beyond. A deeper understanding on both fronts would help to inform discussions around designing and financing validation arrangements. A key question is, 'How does one make visible the benefits of validation, not only the costs?'

### ***What next?***

As was stated by the EC at the closing session of the 3<sup>rd</sup> VPL Biennale (2019), 2019 was an important milestone year in the work on the validation of informal and non-formal learning in Europe. At the end of 2019, the EC reported on actions relating to EU Member States' 2012 commitments, and looked ahead to future work. Stakeholders' discussions fed into that. An open public consultation process was launched to collect information and opinions from the general public and stakeholders, to support the ongoing evaluation of the 2012 Recommendation. The results of this consultation will be used to inform future EU decisions in the area of validation.

In addition, the EU Adult Learning Agenda comes to an end in 2020. The Commission will put forward a new framework post-2020 that will help individuals, companies and society at large, with the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Investments in lifelong skills development are needed for everyone and will be positive for Europe's competitiveness and its social cohesion.

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# PAPER 13



## **Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) in the Nordic countries: A Success Story from Denmark – the ‘Nordic Agenda, Competences for the Future’**

*Ms Antra Carlsen, Ms Bodil Husted, Ms Charlotte Troelsen and Ms Ann Elsebeth Jakobsen*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents three perspectives on the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) in the Nordic countries. Firstly, it outlines the Future Competence Agenda addressed in the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL). Secondly, it discusses the implementation of the legal framework for VPL, and VPL practices in Denmark. It goes on to present a good practice example of how to adopt validation principles in the use of tailored tools for applicants with migrant backgrounds. In the good practice example, the paper discusses how to cope with the issue of language barriers and understandings within traditional text-based approaches to the assessment of study skills in Higher Education.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The idea behind the Nordic agenda for the competencies of the future is to prepare people of all ages for the society that lies ahead. The ambition is that everybody in the Nordic region will have the knowledge and skills to cope with a more complex future. The future implies change; people, organisations and enterprises need to adjust to this change. Moreover, change demands new competencies. The competencies of the future should help people and countries to create new solutions to complex problems; deal with high levels of diversity; meet the challenges of digitisation and demographic development; and develop new ways of working inter-disciplinarily, collaboratively, and so forth.

The strength of the Nordic region lies in its shared history, values, confidence and trust in creating solutions to problems through cooperation. Still, the current

speed of development means that competence requirements need to be identified and communicated at an increasing rate. The flexibility of the education system, the focus on learning outcomes and matching competencies with the labour market needs, are essential factors in the competence development agenda. The sustainable and inclusive growth of the Nordic region depends, to a high degree, on a well-functioning infrastructure for competences – that promotes the development, identification, evaluation, communication, and matching of competences against the requirements of the labour market (Nordic Network for Adult Learning [NVL], 2015:4). At the same time, the Nordic countries wish to educate active, open-minded and responsible citizens and have the tradition of investing in non-formal and leisure time learning. Learning in a non-formal sector and everyday learning can stimulate interest and motivation for further studies, and increases self-confidence that, in turn, can lead to a willingness to assume new tasks and responsibilities, and support mobility in working life.

In the official Nordic cooperation, education and training are important areas of collaboration and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) for Education and Research is a key structure for addressing Nordic solutions to the common challenges the countries face<sup>142</sup>.

## **NORDIC COOPERATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND VPL**

Lifelong learning is an important priority for the Nordic cooperation around education. It covers all types of education, lifelong learning and skills enhancement in the traditional education system, in Adult and Continuing Education and in-service vocational training (NCM, 2017). Everyone’s competencies are important for the sustainable development of the Nordic region, which is why making skills and competencies visible and valuing them is the topic that has been on the Nordic agenda for a long time already. The Nordic cooperation does not aim at creating

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<sup>142</sup> In 1952, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden formed the Nordic Council. Finland joined in 1955. The Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM), founded in 1971, is the official body for the Nordic intergovernmental cooperation.

one solution for all. The countries work with the development of their systems and methods of lifelong learning and validation, while cooperation among the countries is used to share experiences, support each other, create innovations, identify common interests and areas for development, and develop new solutions together. Individually, the Nordic countries may be small but, collectively, the 27 million people of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Greenland, Åland and the Faroe Islands, and the economies of the Nordic countries combined, represent the world's 10th largest economy.

In 2005, a Nordic society and market research (NCM, 2005) stated that the Nordic ambition might be to have the competence development systems with the best understanding of the nature of competence, and the best institutions to disseminate it. Not least with regard to talented people with non-Nordic ethnic backgrounds. While the breadth of competence development is important, it is also vital to exploit the brightest talents that deliver radical ideas with high innovation potential. A study points out that it is essential to use the Nordic strengths within interdisciplinary cooperation to bring people and talent together in ways that generate inspiration and innovation across professional groups, industries, generations, and so forth (NCM, 2005).

In 2008, a Nordic study describing and comparing the policies for the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL or 'validation') in different countries, and how these policies have been expressed in practical measures and activities, was carried out (NVL, 2008). The focus was on validation in three different sectors: the Adult Education sector, the labour market sector, and the third sector (for example, folk high schools, study associations and volunteer organisations) (*Ibid.*). The report concludes that there are similarities and differences between the Nordic countries regarding the development of policy and practice in the field of validation, which means that the countries face somewhat different challenges concerning future developments, processes and needs. At the same time, the study points out specific areas that need to be further developed and investigated. In this process, the Nordic countries could benefit from working collaboratively and using each other as benchmarks.

## POOLING OF THE NORDIC EXPERTISE AND KNOW-HOW

The Nordic Expert Network on Validation<sup>143</sup> has been active since 2005 and has closely followed the national work on validation while supporting the development of both validation policy and practice in the Nordic region. To follow up on the analyses of the status of validation in the region from 2008, the network defines, in a memorandum, 15 challenges in the work of VPL in 2009, and agrees that they will be tackled in cooperation and with inspiration across countries (NVL, 2010). This memorandum is based on the national reports from all the countries prepared during the spring of 2009 (*Ibid.*). The document has been a guideline for the work of the expert network. Tools for practitioners and knowledge-bases for decision-makers have been developed since (NVL, 2019). These respond to the needs of the Nordic countries and connect the Nordic work to European policy-making and guidelines, especially the *Council Recommendation of 2012*<sup>144</sup> on the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

As mentioned, each country takes its path when developing its VPL system according to its national education and labour market policies. Still, the continuous Nordic exchange of experience has been a highly valued source of inspiration. It has meant that the path of development has been shorter and faster, and ensured that the quality of validation is of importance. A few examples illustrate the benefits of the Nordic cooperation quite well.

In Sweden, the government-appointed validation delegation, which began its work in 2016, created a national strategy for developing the validation work. The NVL report on *Validation and the value of competences – the Road Map 2018* (NVL, 2015) has been used by the validation delegation as a source of inspiration in this work. In 2017, a pilot project with four regional seminars (in the

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<sup>143</sup> For more information about the Nordic Expert Network on Validation, please visit <https://nvl.org/validering>

<sup>144</sup> To read more about the Council Recommendation of 2012, please use this link: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8b2f3b0a-4ffb-11e2-9294-01aa75ed71a1>

*Skåne, Dalarna, Västerbotten and Norrbotten* counties of Sweden) was carried out in a collaboration between NVL and the National Agency for Education (NAE) in Sweden. The Nordic model for the quality assurance of the validation process, and a completed research project (NVL, 2017) based on the quality model, are essential parts of the Swedish regional seminars.

Due to the constructive and comprehensive cooperation with the Nordic Expert Network on Validation, the validation question in the Faroe Islands has been brought to a more advanced and secure position. At the beginning of 2014, a Bill on Validation was made available for consultation with various actors before it was subsequently discussed in the *Lagting* (Parliament of the Faroe Islands). A Faroese member of the Nordic network together with officials of the Ministry of Education, Research and Culture, played a leading role in this work. On May 2, 2014, the Bill on Validation was passed unanimously. There is cooperation between the validation institutions in the Faroe Islands, and those in Iceland and Denmark, both of which have expressed interest in, and a willingness to assist, the implementation of competency assessment and validation in the Faroe Islands.

## **VPL IN DENMARK**

In Denmark, VPL has been on the agenda for about 20 years, and a legal framework has been in place since 2007. The Danish approach to VPL is decentralised, based on common principles. As such, the authority to provide a complete VPL process, with assessment and recognition, lies with the formal educational institutions. Every educational institution must offer validation prior to the corresponding study programme. The VPL system in Denmark can, (1) enable access to formal education; (2) tailor a study programme or award credits for certain classes up to, but not including, the Master's Degree level (National Qualifications Framework [NQF] Level 7), and (3) award a Competence Certificate if the participant meets the requirements for fulfilling parts of an educational programme. A full qualification award is possible, though rarely met/ attained by applicants.

Furthermore, the Danish validation system includes a ‘pre-phase’ (information, identification and guidance). Candidates pay a fixed amount for the VPL process, based on a taximeter principle, for an institutions’ provision of VPL. However, while the educational institutions are responsible for offering these pre-phases, in reality, the institutions are not obliged to support applicants’ development of the documentation portfolios. In reality, these portfolios appear to be quite complicated and time-consuming for applicants. Hence, other bodies such as trade unions, employers’ associations or Public Employment Service Centres might offer counselling for these pre-phases. The application for VPL to access Higher Education and Vocational and Diploma programmes (at NQF Levels 5 and 6), enables applicants to have their prior learning recognised.

The 2015 reform on Vocational Education and Training Programmes (VET) – with a special track for adults 25 of years and older – includes compulsory VPL prior to the VET education. The intention is to shorten the duration of education. The VPL recognises documented and assessed prior learning competencies, based on the relevant work experience and formal education. Thereafter, as a post-validation result, an individual curriculum is prepared for the remaining education needed by each applicant.

According to the Danish model for the development and monitoring of education and training across the entire educational system, strong stakeholder collaboration secures the legitimacy of, and trust in, the VPL results. Sector organisations develop the criteria and standards for VPL and assessment according to the specific study programmes. However, there are challenges in terms of formal educational institutions’ rights to recognise the prior learning for access to specific study programmes.

Among others, a key challenge occurs when – in the assessment process – the knowledge forms of learning from practice meet with the formal educational/academic knowledge. The Research and Development (R&D) Programme for VPL at the VIA University College in Denmark has developed a model for coping

with this problem (VIA University College, 2013). The model is termed ‘the Meeting Point’ as it illustrates the possible controversies when a lifelong learning approach meets with formal academia. The model emphasises the requirements of VPL professionals to enable the translation between applicants’ competences ‘to do’/ ‘to cope with’, and the education programme competences ‘to know’/ ‘to have insight’. This translation must be supported in the meeting point between ‘learning and control’ – between the ‘formative and summative domains’.

Research generally demonstrates the tendency to prioritise academic approaches when assessing prior learning competences. The reasons for this clearly have to do with the educational institutions’ awareness of ensuring trust and legitimacy to the results of VPL processes. However, the requirement for the availability of a more widely composed sample of methods for assessment is probably also a partial explanation for this challenge.

The current tripartite agreement for Continuing Higher Education (Ministry of Children and Education, Denmark, 2017) gives priority to the development of measures that can motivate employers and employees to make more use of Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET) through VPL. Furthermore, the agreement gives priority to improving the VPL system by widening the recognition of applicants’ prior learning. Among other requirements, this calls for the development of the VPL practices to cope with the above-mentioned translation challenges.

Recent research and development projects within the ‘R&D Programme for VPL’ at VIA University College have a specific focus on the biographic approach to validation using formative methods of assessment and recognition. In one of these projects, new methods were developed for the documentation and assessment of applicants with migrant backgrounds, for access to the professional Bachelor of Education programmes (Olesen, Aagaard and Husted, 2017). The good practice example of this paper originates from this project.

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> VPL Biennale held in Berlin in 2019, the *Berlin Declaration on the Validation of Prior Learning* was developed and adopted by delegates<sup>145</sup>. The Declaration covers the key requirements for VPL systems. It is a founding document, and serves as a ‘grassroots push’ for stakeholders and policy-makers to make validation policies bolder, more effective and more inclusive. The six streams of the 3<sup>rd</sup> VPL Biennale matched the six themes in the Declaration. At the event, there were background papers that informed discussion around the six themes, and their finalisation. By the final vote, 91.9% of the Biennale participants adopted the Declaration.

The Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL), with the Expert Network for Validation of Prior Learning, was responsible for the development of the Background Paper for the 3<sup>rd</sup> VPL Biennale, Theme 3, Section 3: Procedures and Instruments. In the final Declaration, one of the recommendations (Section 3[2])<sup>146</sup>, states that:

“Trusted, recognised and updatable [validation] instruments should enable individualised pathways and accommodate the diversity of candidates and learning paths”

The practice example below demonstrates a Danish case and success story in accordance with the paragraph above.

## **CASE STUDY: THE VPL INTERVIEW FOR APPLICANTS WITH MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS**

### ***Background***

This case involved around 100 VPL assessments conducted by Charlotte Troelsen and Ann Elsebeth Jakobsen at VIA University College. Both of the researchers are Associate Professors, Study Counsellors, and VPL Assessors for

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<sup>145</sup> Accessed on 21 October 2019, at: <https://vplbiennale.org/berlin-declaration-on-validation-of-prior-learning/>

<sup>146</sup> Accessed on 21 October 2019, at: [https://vplbiennale.org/assets/uploads/2019/05/190503\\_Background\\_papers\\_procedures\\_and\\_instruments.pdf/](https://vplbiennale.org/assets/uploads/2019/05/190503_Background_papers_procedures_and_instruments.pdf/)

educational programmes at the university. The case illustrates how to challenge the summative and formative aspects of a VPL process when mapping the educational competencies of applicants with refugee and immigrant backgrounds.

VPL aims to map the full range of skills that justify admission to Bachelor's programmes in Higher Education. The VPL interviews in Denmark favour ethnic Danish applicants. The individual assessments are coded with culturally conditioned narratives that are self-evident and transparent for ethnically Danish applicants and the Assessors. The interviews also examine the applicants' Danish linguistic competence. Furthermore, including a professional article in the conversation often opens up shared conceptual fields for ethnic Danish applicants, whereas for people with refugee and immigrant backgrounds, the language in the articles can be restrictive as it is part of particular discourse and contains specific codes. This one-sided focus on linguistic competences overshadows VPL applicants' overall life experiences, which include, for example, insights into coping strategies used in adversity, in everyday life and elsewhere.

The research followed candidates as they transitioned into Higher Education. It revealed three particular applicant characteristics that emerged as benchmarks for whether VPL applicants were eventually likely to complete their Higher Education studies, namely, robustness, persistence, and problem-solving ability. These three factors were more critical than the Danish linguistic competence assessment. This focus does not mean ignoring the Danish linguistic capabilities, but that applicants who have the three qualities tend to complete their Higher Education even if they encounter linguistic barriers. They manage to transition across diverse arenas.

The challenge in the VPL admission interview is, therefore, to organise a process that highlights the applicants' overall life experiences. What follows is a brief account of why the design and intention of the VPL interviews needed to be sharpened. It sheds light on the language imperfections and the communication disruptions that inevitably arise in the VPL interview conversations. The case study showed how the use of photographs adds nuances to the discussions and,

thus, the bases of the VPL assessments: applicants’ narratives form the basis for expanded understandings of life courses.

### ***How does a VPL interview bring out the relevant competencies when there are language challenges?***

One challenge that has repeatedly emerged in the VPL interviews, especially with bilingual people, is the form of the dialogue. These conversations often become incoherent and superficial, with short responses to questions in the attempts to explain issues. The discussions become disjointed.

In the VPL interviews, an underlying theme is the importance of the interview results for the approval of candidate access to Higher Education. Therefore, there is an obligation on the part of the applicant to respond to the questions as well as possible and in a way that conveys motivation (whether the questions are understood or not). On the other hand, the language problem appeared significantly when the VPL conversation ‘stretched’ the applicants instead of supporting them when they explained the motivation for their studies. The effects of the conversations could have negative outcomes for the applicants and leave the Assessors with feelings of the insufficiency and inadequacy of the interview.

The VPL conversations include various types of communication; at the beginning of the interviews, the Assessors explain the processes to make sure that the applicants understand the deadlines, decisions, and so forth. In the interviews themselves, where the applicants have to show their competencies, the Assessors play a communicative role.

In conversations with bilingual people, it is not always possible to reach common understandings around concepts or phenomena, regardless of language skills. In the VPL interviews, the use of language clarifies whether the applicants have the qualifications/ competencies needed to access Higher Education. An essential part of the content of a VPL admission interview is how applicants present their challenges and strengths with respect to the potential qualification for which access is sought. The selection of an academic, pedagogical article is

based on normative considerations on how pedagogy is understood, and thus the applicant is guided towards specific interpretations and modes of action. As a VPL Assessor, one can easily ask for something specific and, in the answers, look for something specific because it is something recognised. This method of conducting an interview is done with the conviction that, with professionalism and good intentions, we could identify the applicants' competences.

The challenge, especially with the VPL conversations with bilingual people, is that people cannot exist without context; thoughts and contexts mediate in language and non-verbal actions. However, peoples' linguistic utterances do not capture all of their thought activity. Linguistic preconditions and challenges might support the perceptions/ thinking capacity of the applicants. In practice, this reality can negatively affect applicants' VPL conversations – imperfections and lack of nuances in the language could be interpreted as a lack of the cognitive skills or capacity needed to become a student in a formal education programme.

### ***Using pictures in VPL conversations***

Based on the realities sketched, the researchers used photographs as the basis for the VPL conversations in the study – both with ethnic Danish- and bilingual applicants. The intention was that the use of images would open up the conversations. There are several arguments for this choice but, most importantly, the photographs are more interpretive, and more culturally neutral, than are texts. A photograph always holds more than the individual can immediately see; it is not possible to exhaust the meanings of a photograph. Any picture presents 'spaces' which viewers can fill. Viewers with the same cultural backgrounds may fill these spaces in similar ways; in the face of cultural difference, different meanings and understandings could emerge. It was hoped that pictures would open more spaces for bilingual applicants.

When selecting the photographs, each applicant had an opportunity to choose which themes he or she wished to discuss. It was thought that through the pictures, applicants would relate more easily in the interview and focus on their

formal and informal competencies in ways that would aid their access to the formal education programmes. The photographs were used as pointers to guide the conversations. In contrast, the conversations based on academic articles were more abstract; the language in these papers represent a symbolic sign system. Photographs provide more room for interpretation and, thus, more open codes than professional articles. The use of pictures supported applicants' opportunities to join the conversations, set the agenda, and enable speaking more freely.

### ***Procedure for the VPL conversation***

VPL applicants were asked to select at least three pictures from a stack of photographs, to use in their presentations on, 'My life course up to today, when I apply for [formal] education'. The conversations were based on the selected images.

Inserting the pictures into a life-course supported the narrative nature of the conversation. For all of the VPL applicants, the researchers viewed the individuals' lifelong learning and skills acquisition as being valuable for the admission to education. The experience showed that the pictures opened up a variety of narratives, each of which signalled the ability to complete formal education. These narratives were not highlighted when the point of departure had been the narrow focus of an analysis of a professional article. The changed process created a space in which interpretations and different perspectives could be included; opportunities for applicant participation were increased. The conversation became a dialogue on the VPL applicants' premises, where the Assessors had the opportunity to ask about the empty spaces in the pictures. In this way, the Assessors could highlight the metaphorical significance of the images for the proposed educational courses. However, since the conversation was based on pictures, it became an open dialogue about possible perspectives.

The fact that the VPL applicants were requested to choose photographs for discussion meant that there was a natural focus on the applicants' motivations

to study. The Assessors wanted to increase the opportunities for applicant participation in the conversation. The pictures were good starting points for individuals to show their understanding. Focusing on the applicant diminished the tendency of the Assessors to interrogate, and removed the experience of communication as transmission. The use of the photographs made the interview room more open and interpretive, as the applicants, based on their own experiences, could choose perspectives on their own lives in their selection of the pictures, and their narratives, and so create a context for their educational access.

### ***Reflections on the changes in the VPL process***

In meeting with the VPL applicants, the VPL Assessors became aware that the traditional VPL conversations reproduced knowledge and used known reflection patterns; the self-affirming nature of the old approach meant that applicants' thinking was unchallenged. One might call that type of reflection pattern, calcification. Hence, this paper has attempted to abstract, generalise, and formulate a different approach to VPL recording interviews, which allows the applicants' narratives to become more prominent in the conversations. In this approach, the applicants' narratives raise questions. Assessors occupy a position that is curiously interested in the applicants' stories. The Assessors still need to be able to uncover formative and summative criteria, but these identify themselves along the way in the narratives. By changing the thinking and course of the VPL interviews' form and content, the Assessors have become aware of the importance of the value of the conversation itself. In this sense, the benefits of the VPL interview do not only relate to fixed objectives. Instead, they link to the applicants' lived experiences, to the spontaneous and sovereign expressions of life. These utterances become clearer when the Assessors stop controlling the conversation and listen to the lived experiences and the thinking of the applicants. The new perspective for the VPL includes the use of images that, with their spaces for interpretation among other things, help applicants to foreground the relevant narratives. This perspective opens a much more meaningful conversation, where

the Assessors see more of the applicants and have even better bases for the assessments.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This paper presented an overview of the current strategies and activities within the field of VPL in the Nordic region. It described how VPL is organised in Denmark as well as presenting an actual case example from Denmark. VPL has been high on the political priority agenda in the Nordic countries. While each country develops and proceeds on their own, as explained in the Danish example, the cooperation aspect among the Nordic countries is important. Benchmarking among the countries and the continuous exchange of experience helps each to progress in the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

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# PAPER 14



# Valuing Human Capital: The Case of Refugees and Migrants in Europe

*Ms Rosa Duvekot and Dr Ruud Duvekot*

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## ABSTRACT

The process of Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is at the heart of making learning in all contexts and for any purpose worthwhile. VPL is a system that strengthens the role of the individual citizen in shaping her/his lifelong learning. It can demonstrate the outcomes of learning for the purposes of profit (status, money), efficiency (time, customisation), and enjoyment. The learning-programme-independent nature of the assessment enhances the effects that VPL can create for personal objectives in terms of qualifications, career development and personal meaning. This paper looks at the impact of such VPL when implemented by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the sake of including refugees and migrants – also referred to as ‘newcomers’ – in their new countries.

## INTRODUCTION

Linking learning to social participation, inclusion and career-opportunities, and the changes in prevailing attitudes on learning are important themes that allow us to understand the current transition towards a (lifelong) learning society. In a ‘learning society’, everyone is encouraged to continue to learn throughout their lives and learning processes are supposed to be inclusive for all learners. In such a society, the role of human capital is all the more important since steering the development and sustainable utilisation of human capital is not just a matter of investment in continuous learning, but becomes more and more a matter of self-steered ownership of learning by the individual her- and himself. This phenomenon is all the more apparent when we analyse this transition on the micro-level of individual cases of refugees and migrants with higher levels of education as they integrate their human capital in a ‘new’ country.

Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) is at the heart of making the transition beneficial for all stakeholders. VPL focuses on recognising, valuing, validating and *further* developing the competences that someone previously learned. This entails instrumentation for recognising and valuing what people have learned so far and linking this value to further developmental steps.

This paper looks at the impact of VPL implemented by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the sake of making Higher Education programmes accessible, thereby strengthening the inclusion of newcomers in their new country. The research is based on an analysis of 43 in-depth case studies of ‘newcomers’ or migrants and refugees in Europe for the Erasmus+ project *Validation for the Inclusion of New Citizens in Europe* (VINCE)<sup>147</sup>.

## THE LEARNING SOCIETY AND VPL

The concept of ‘the learning society’ originated in the 1960s/70s. In this era there was a growing need for skilled labour. This led to more attention in national policies, on the role of education in managing the rise in ‘social and economic wealth’. Education was linked with lifelong learning and a significant and relevant means of transforming social and political life for this purpose (Gelpi, 1985; Hobsbawm, 1994). These developments called for a learning society built on the notions that learning is important and valuable and that all people need to invest continuously in their potential. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) articulated this focus on learning in 1972 as follows.

“If learning involves all of one’s life, in the sense of both time-span and diversity, and all of society, [-] then we must go even further than the necessary overhaul of ‘educational systems’ until we reach the stage of

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<sup>147</sup> The Erasmus+ is the European programme for education, training, youth and sport – it aims to modernise education, training, and youth work across Europe. Through it, organisations can apply for funding each year, for life-changing activities (see <http://vince.eucen.eu> or <https://ec-vpl.nl>)

*a learning society. For these are the true proportions of the challenge education will be facing in the future” (Faure et al 1972:xxxiii)*

In such a learning society, VPL acts as a connector for creating and facilitating lifelong learning by enabling learners to (1) validate their prior learning achievements and (2) create further learning strategies when reflecting on this prior learning. VPL utilises past learning experiences for creating new learning perspectives. VPL steers people’s empowerment with its focus on the freedom of choice and action to shape one’s life. It implies the ownership of ones’ learning and focuses on ‘the voice of the self’ when participating and negotiating with other actors in the learning arena on the why, how and what of further learning (Giddens, 1991; Narayan, 2005). Such empowerment challenges the existing education system and demands the design of flexible and tailor-made learning in any given context, for any purpose.

VPL strengthens the role of the individual in creating learning perspectives. It demonstrates the value of learning in terms of profit (status, money), efficiency (time, customisation), and enjoyment. The learning-programme-independent nature of assessment enhances the impact of VPL for various personal objectives: achieving qualifications, career-steps, personal meaning, *etcetera*. (Duvekot, 2016). VPL is a process of five consecutive phases, as follows.

1. **Identification** of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
2. **Documentation** of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
3. **Assessment** of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning.
4. **Certification** of the results of the assessment of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate (Cedefop, 2015:14).

These four phases of the VPL process offer an outlook on learning strategies in which the organisational context [labour market] and learning services of schools and universities are crucial for keeping up with the speed of individual capacitation and development. A fifth phase needs to be in place for VPL to establish its true promise, namely:

5. **VPL follow-up** entails activities in learning and working that enable the accredited learning outcomes of the person to be utilised for creating a variety of perspectives in the worlds of learning and working.

When enabling VPL as a five phase-process, HEIs enable newcomers to create an open dialogue with university staff on the nature and direction of further learning, taking into account the value of their prior learning.

## **CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF COUNTRIES AND INDIVIDUALS**

The case studies to which this paper refers investigated the phenomenon of including newcomers in a holistic way, from the top-down or systems perspective as well as the bottom-up or individual perspective. The system is analysed at country-level across Europe and incorporates inputs from 11 interviews with university staff; the analysis on the individual level is based on 43 in-depth case studies of migrants and refugees.

The focus in the study was on refugees and migrants with higher education levels since their human capital potential could be validated effectively due to the uniformity of Higher Education levels and standards across Europe on the one hand, and the needs of Europe's learning societies for a higher educated population on the other. The role of HEIs is not limited to helping refugees and migrants better to integrate into society; it also acts as a valuable platform for promoting social cohesion, solidarity, tolerance, diversity and human rights.

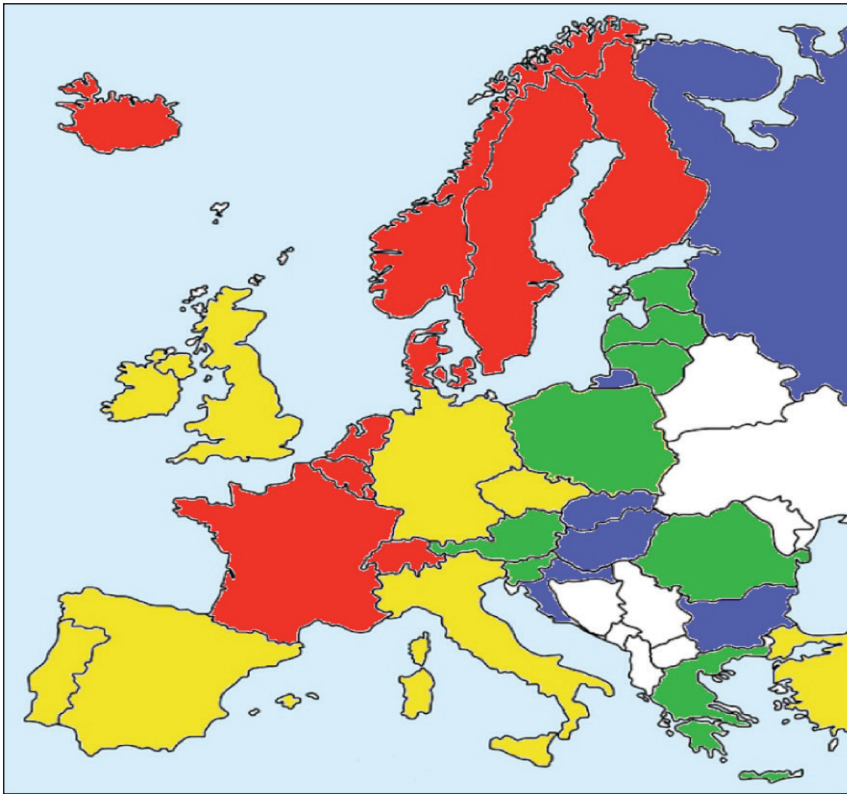
The main questions to be answered are, 'How and to what extent is VPL facilitated across Europe in HEIs, and how is this helpful for strengthening the inclusion of higher educated newcomers?' The term 'newcomer' covers *migrants within*

Europe and *refugees coming from outside* Europe. The impact-analysis in the study centres on their learning-, career- and life-objectives in the new country. The study objectives were (1) getting better insights into the practice of VPL in HEIs, (2) documenting good practices, and (3) recommending how to implement VPL for newcomers more effectively in Europe's HEIs.

### ***Country-analysis***

Migrants and refugees are often prevented from enjoying their rights by legal and practical barriers. A main challenge these newcomers face is that, although they are often educated and skilled, their competences may not be recognised in the new country. Their skills and knowledge may not fit into predefined bureaucratic policies and procedures, documentation is lacking or their curriculum does not match the certification structures in the host country. This hinders their access to the labour force and/or to continuing their studies, jeopardising their chances of fully integrating into their new contexts. From this perspective, the VPL-process may assist.

The analysis of data on legislation, funding and facilities (information-provision, professional staff), favouring VPL as an entry-point for newcomers in HEIs from 37 countries, led to a grouping of four prevailing country-systems. In the four groupings, the five phases of the VPL-process were applied 'broadly', 'marginally' or 'not at all'. Figure 1 shows this grouping.



**Figure 1: The use of VPL in European HEIs, 2017 (Source: Duvekot and Duvekot, 2018).**

Key:

**The RED group**, comprises countries with the following. (1) Favourable national legal frameworks for applying VPL, (2) operationalised VPL in HEIs, which address the prior formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences of individuals, (3) funding at the national, sectoral and/or Non-Government Organisation (NGO) levels, and (4) opportunities for anchoring the outcomes of VPL in career-perspectives involving Higher Education, the labour market and the third sector<sup>148</sup>. Group 1 countries are situated mainly in North and North-West Europe in: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

**The YELLOW group** consists of countries with the following. (1) Favourable national legal frameworks for applying VPL, (2) operationalised VPL in HEIs, which address the prior formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences of individuals, (3) funding at the national, sectoral and/or NGO levels, and (4) opportunities for anchoring the outcomes of VPL in both HE and in the labour market or the third sector. Group 2 countries lie across North-West, South and Central Europe: the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

**The GREEN group** holds countries with: (1) a favourable national legal framework for applying VPL, (2) operationalised VPL in HEIs, only taking care however of formal prior learning

<sup>148</sup> The 'third sector' is the voluntary or non-profit sector of an economy (see for example <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/third-sector.html>).

experiences, (3) funding only on the national level, and (4) opportunities for anchoring the VPL-outcomes to only Higher Education, the labour market or the third sector. Group 3 covers Austria, the Baltic States, Cyprus, Greece, Liechtenstein, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovenia.

**The BLUE group** comprises countries with: (1) no favourable national legal framework for applying VPL, (2) no operationalised VPL in HEIs, (3) no funding available whatsoever, and (4) no opportunities for anchoring the outcomes of VPL in Higher Education, the labour market or the third sector. Countries in this group are Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovakia and Russia.

## ***Individual analysis***

In total, there were 43 individual case studies of refugees and migrants with higher education levels. Data collection and analysis took place in 2017. The countries involved were in Austria (seven cases), Denmark (three), France (six), Germany (five), Greece (five), Hungary (two), Netherlands (ten) and Norway (five). These newcomers experienced the VPL-process more or less in the same manner, seeking recognition, validation and accreditation for civil, social and/or personal perspectives in their new countries.

On the personal level, the main analytical aspects coming to the fore were the refugees' and migrants' agency, the affordances of HEIs, the importance of information and guidance, the impact of the consecutive VPL-phases and the ownership of one's learning outcomes.

The individual case-analyses demonstrated the following.

- Characteristics of policy development not only show the slowness of implementation in the practices of HEIs, but also that open dialogue on the opportunities in Higher Education is conducive to the activation of the individual learner.
- Refugees and migrants are hesitant in accessing VPL-processes at first, but once they are informed and guided, and reflect on their learning experiences, they clearly become empowered and engaged.
- Information provision on the potential benefits of VPL is crucial for the agency of target groups. Newcomers feel 'listened to' and informally valued when helped in demonstrating their prior formal, non-formal and/or informal

learning experiences. This encourages them to engage in participatory actions.

- Newcomers profit likewise from VPL in terms of psychology (empowerment, self-esteem), educational attainment (exemptions, and if available, tailored learning) and career-perspectives (clarity about social opportunities, tuning in to the best fit in personal experiences *plus* Higher Education qualifications *plus* career options).
- Newcomers experience the same difficulties in formulating and proving their prior learning experiences, as do other students enrolling in Higher Education. A main obstacle is the dominant learning paradigm in which people were educated and disciplined. Like European students, newcomers were educated in a *monological* education system in which the teacher is the knowledge-bearer and the pupil/ student has to listen to the teacher's voice. This holds back the student's self-validation of personal learning experiences and is not helpful in creating a *dialogue* on learning in a VPL-steered process.
- Students taking the time to reflect on their learning experiences strengthen their positions in their dialogues on further learning with HEIs and/or employers. In most cases, the dialogue operated as a 'gap-closer' between the refugees/ migrants and portfolio-trainer/ teacher/ employer; in this way, they managed to build bridges to personalised and tailored programmes.
- The portfolio is the carrier of the VPL-process. Guidance or mentoring in the documentation phase is highly beneficial for the newcomers.
- With the creation of a transparent portfolio of personal, prior learning experiences, the personal ownership of (lifelong) learning is enhanced. By articulating ones' learning achievements and reflecting on the value of these, by self-assessing ones' strengths and weaknesses (SWOT), self-efficacy becomes a driver for turning this retrospective ownership of learning into a dialogue for activating prospective learning opportunities.

- The supportive and facilitative role of NGOs is manifest, not only in funding VPL but also in providing information and guidance for VPL. NGOs also play a stimulating role in building up the affordances of VPL in HEIs for newcomers, by networking and lobbying. Therefore, they can play a decisive role in convincing HEIs to afford VPL-facilities for the target groups.
- The return-on-investment of a structured portfolio training for the preparation of a VPL-procedure is beneficial for newcomers. The same goes for language training and bridging courses (acculturation and additional competence development for solving knowledge deficits).
- Assessment helps to connect all actors in the process. This effect occurs in all forms of assessment analysed in the cases: *assessment of, for and as learning* (or: summative, formative and reflective assessment).
- There is a real dynamic space between the system (top-down) and the VPL process (bottom-up), but depending on the intended learning objective, results are obtained always, for different actors. If the system is in control, due to an *inside-out approach*, it is mainly the organisation and ‘the university’ that benefit; if the process is prioritised in an *outside-in approach*, then the learner benefits.

## CONCLUSIONS

VPL is acknowledged for opening learning opportunities for newcomers by recognising and valuing what they have already learned. This analysis answers the questions as to how, and to what extent, VPL is facilitated in Europe’s HEIs and how this enhances the newcomers’ inclusion. The main conclusions are fourfold.

Firstly, information-provision on VPL, including guidance services, plays an important role in the utilisation of VPL by the target groups. Information and guidance are the so-called ‘front-office’ for raising awareness of the potential of peoples’ prior learning experiences at Higher Education level. The staff in

Higher Education need to be well-trained in guidance, and need to be able to oversee the integral process of VPL and further learning programming.

Secondly, the responsibilities of all VPL-actors are linked to specific purposes for engaging in VPL-processes. Many objectives may occur in specific national or sectoral contexts, especially since the true impact of VPL lies in the combination of certification, strengthening one's self-esteem and articulation of the competence-needs of learners. In this way, all VPL-actors cooperate holistically by inter-linking each other's objectives and responsibilities. In such a holistic 'adventure', all actors taking up their responsibilities and affording access to Higher Education need to have open minds to formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. This is important for creating an impact via VPL on the individual level. It entails giving 'a voice to the learner'. This works best if the learner can get a grip on social perspectives assisted by the VPL-process. Creating such perspectives is, next to good-quality guidance and assessment, a critical success factor for VPL in HEIs.

Thirdly, the objectives and impact of VPL in HEIs tied in with the four main rationales for integrating VPL in specific national, sector or regional contexts: educational benefit, employability, Human Resources Development (HRD) and lifelong learning. The educational rationale, which involves obtaining exemptions for a partial or a full qualification, prevails in most countries and regions. The economically motivated usage of VPL at Higher Education level that takes care of competence-recognition and employability for career motives follows as another main driver. The more socially engaged VPL is apparent in fewer countries but it is a strong driver for governments to face the challenge of dealing with competent but unqualified or under-qualified target groups in society. VPL for participatory aims in the third or volunteer sector, or civil society, is the least practiced. Only in the Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries where it is utilised for recognising the indigenous values of minority groups or for strengthening the quality of volunteer-work and civil society activities, is there a clear focus on VPL for this purpose in HEIs.

Fourth, the expertise of VPL staff (Portfolio Guides, Advisors and Assessors) is very important in achieving maximum awareness of the value of personal learning experiences when newcomers reach out to HEIs in their new countries. For newcomers, the inclusive quality of Higher Education depends strongly on (1) universities acknowledging the value of prior personal learning experiences (formal and informal/ non-formal) and (2) staff members excelling in outreach, guidance, portfolio management, assessment and counselling with regard to matching prior and future learning trajectories. In addition, the quality assurance of VPL processes also depends on the expertise of the staff, how their expertise is acquired and maintained, and how staff members are embedded and accepted in qualification systems and systems of Human Resource Development in the labour market and the third sector.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

A number of recommendations or challenges in anchoring VPL in HEIs for refugees and migrants can be formulated when looking at the conclusions based on the information provided in the country- and individual cases.

Moving from policy to practice is imperative for creating more inclusive HEIs. VPL is clearly a key component for the individuals' opportunities to manage shifts in modern life in terms of their lifelong learning and careers. This is also the case for refugees and migrants trying to build careers in new countries. To make VPL a core element in newcomer integration/ participation in the new country, the individual needs information, guidance and counselling that emphasise both learning and work perspectives, in order to secure longer-term relevance and value for the individual.

Strengthening VPL practice entails upscaling the investments in (1) raising awareness of the value of prior learning experiences, (2) providing information on VPL-services offered (information, guidance, assessment), and (3) strengthening the linkage of national qualification standards and occupational standards, as well as the coordination between national stakeholders and HEIs.

The awareness of the value of a VPL approach in HEIs that focuses on learner needs and values not only formal but also informal and non-formal learning results, depends on the consensus reached among all actors (target-group representatives, Information Officers, Assessors, Guides, Teachers) in VPL processes in and around HEIs. The actors can support awareness and consensus. Moreover, any actor can help to strengthen the information-provision to the target groups by reaching out to them directly or indirectly, through their representatives/ spokespeople in the new country.

A critical aspect for all HEIs is the importance of engaging designated target groups by making VPL a personalised process. In order for people to 'be listened to' when engaging in learning, they need to be able to articulate their learning experiences, identify their personal competences, and link these competences to perspectives and roles in society.

The migrants' and refugees' voices highlight the need for 'ownership of learning' and the ensuing inclusion of their preferences and possibilities – regarding settings, time, cost, progression – in the formulation of VPL strategies, and the execution of VPL processes in HEIs. Good quality guidance and assessment are essential in VPL processes, to enable the individual ownership of learning experiences. The American Institute for Personalised Learning (Rickabaugh, 2012:9) advocates, in its educational services for schools and educators, that:

“The greatest gift to learners is to give them the tools, insights, and understanding necessary to be in charge of their own learning and lives.... When learners understand how to channel their interest and curiosity, they gain the ability to motivate themselves. When learners begin to own their learning, they gain a prized possession to protect, build, and maintain for a lifetime”

Successfully applying VPL holds in this way the promise of creating social and/or economic perspectives for people that link to their intrinsic values and agency. Bray and McClaskey (2015) perceive such personalisation as the next

development in the learning system based on the engaged, self-managing, learning individual operating in a supportive network, all within the modern, learning society. The offer of a shortened, self-steered and flexible learning path for obtaining Higher Education qualifications is in this respect more than formalising personal learning experiences; it is more an opportunity for personal empowerment in terms of strengthening life skills, including literacy and numeracy, and social participation in a learning society.

The expertise of VPL Portfolio Guides, Counsellors, Advisors and Assessors is very important for maximising awareness of the value of personal learning, and creating motivation and an ambition for VPL. It is also important for creating learning/ social opportunities in HEIs and society. HEIs need to invest in the development and maintenance of occupational standards for these categories of staff. Further, these standards should be linked to internal Human Resource management systems in HEIs, and offer the chance for career-paths in HEIs for VPL-professionals.

In addition to career-paths for the professionalisation of VPL, HEIs could also invest in research programmes that focus on VPL in the educational, social and economic domains. Research is needed into the value added by VPL, among other things, in terms of its economic, financial and social effects.

When achieving a specific VPL outcome for Higher Education-competent refugees and migrants, it is a critical success factor to offer actual social or economic perspectives. Sector-based and regional VPL-practices present successes (Singh, 2015) especially if the involved organisations/ companies ensure that their formulation of demands for functions and activities at Higher Education level is transparent. This strategy works especially well when focusing on tackling skills gaps or offering further learning pathways.

Following VPL processes, tailored, further learning options need to be offered by HEIs. These options need to be flexible in order to boost peoples' desires to keep on learning. The VPL approach benefits from optimising a variety of

learning environments and forms of learning, since the outcomes of VPL processes depend on the learning environments and/or forms of learning suited to individuals. These efforts may include (combinations of) work-based learning, mentoring/ tutoring, self-steered learning, distance learning, peer learning, and others.

Open dialogue on validation and learning between the VPL candidates and actors in the learning and/or working systems can be effective when the co-development of people's pathways are accepted and afforded (Duvekot, 2017). The subsequent open dialogue is able to connect – retrospectively – the learning histories of refugees and migrants with higher education levels – and prospectively – what they still need to learn in their new countries.

VPL can be a strong guiding vision and tool by affording an open dialogical process of validation and learning between the learner and the teacher/ employer in both the validation as well as the learning processes. There are two key aspects.

1. In the VPL process, the testing (summative) and advisory (formative) functions of validation in the dialogue between (the portfolio of) the learner and the (qualification standards of the) teacher and/or the (occupational standards of the) employer are used to recognise, value and accredit learning outcomes. In this process there are assessment tools that are product-, or process-oriented. Process-oriented means that learning outcomes are assessed in integrated and interlinked ways, whereas product-oriented validation is based on the value of the learning outcome in itself.
2. The learning process aims at offering learning that cannot (yet) be realised through validation or which the learner believes is desirable. This process is personalised in terms of content, form and meaning. The learner can have a say in the design of the personal learning trajectory within the framework of the study programme. This applies for refugees and migrants as much as for any other learners.

## CLOSING WORDS

The overall conclusion in this paper is that VPL still has a long way to go before it is embedded across Europe's HEIs. Good practices from Danish, Dutch, French and Norwegian HEIs demonstrate that much is possible in affording refugees and migrants VPL opportunities when they need or want access to Higher Education. In these practices, VPL is a gateway that successfully links people's competences – whether acquired formally, informally or non-formally – to access to Higher Education programmes. Furthermore, offering the remaining competences needed after the VPL assessments, in tailored and flexible learning pathways, is another critical success factor. Both of these critical success factors depend strongly upon the willingness and the ability to recognise the competences acquired 'outside of academia'; that is more a matter of ambassadorship of committed VPL staff in HEIs, open mindedness and embracing the dialogue of validation and learning, than of assessment-methodologies or interview-techniques.

The analyses in this paper give credit to Paolo Freire's (1970) idea that learning needs to be addressed as a developmental and dialogical process of 'action-reflection-praxis', of, and by, people (i.e. teachers and learners). The process should contrast with the traditional 'banking-system' (*Ibid.*). By 'banking', Freire meant a process of 'knowledge transfer' to learners, with teachers as the sole distributors of knowledge, and the learners as passive receivers. The processes of dialogical validation and learning suit every learner with prior learning experiences, including refugees and migrants. Instead of 'banking', the ground floor for learning can better be 'portfolio-ing', in which learning is based on personal, prior learning experiences and the self-management of recurring learning processes.

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# **CLOSING REFLECTIONS**



## Lessons from the Papers in this Volume

*Mr Tshepho Mokwele*

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### OFFERINGS IN THE BULLETIN

In the **introductory section** to this Bulletin, Bolton outlines the context for the papers and the theme for this volume. She highlights the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) policy basket in which inclusivity – the overarching theme of this publication – is central. The section sketches the story of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa and offers the rationale for the selection of ‘inclusivity’ as a focal area. Bolton importantly notes that the South African NQF aims to enhance access, redress, progression, quality and transparency in education, training, development and work underscored by the principles lifelong learning and inclusivity in which RPL is critical. The section continues to set the scene by highlighting the development of RPL, forms of RPL, and RPL policies at the different levels in South Africa. It outlines the five-year research partnership between the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC), which culminated in a peer-reviewed publication on RPL. Notably, the data from the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD) include 34,367 qualification achievements, and 1 545 305 part-qualification achievements via RPL to date<sup>149</sup>. The 14 contributions to this Bulletin explore a myriad of topics – such as RPL, various ways to recognise learning, Work-Integrated Learning, workplace learning, Adult Education, Workers’ Education, national and regional structures, the provision of advice and guidance, access to fundamental learning, upskilling, professionalisation, international initiatives – and how these advance inclusivity. Others could learn from these examples, scale-up and develop them further in various contexts.

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<sup>149</sup> Unfortunately, not all qualification and part-qualification achievements via RPL were uploaded into the NLRD; it has been mandatory to do so since 2014.

In **paper 1**, Ralphs, Prinsloo, and Mcube explore the growth and development of the *RPL for access* programme at UWC (2001-2018). Due to RPL programmes and services becoming increasingly specialised and in demand, the authors suggest that dedicated staff and resources are required to grapple with the emerging contextual challenges and to maintain the excellent standards and quality of RPL. *RPL for access* at UWC, they report, has been in place since 2001 and had supported over 850 mature students as they transitioned into undergraduate level studies by 2018. Of fundamental importance is that Ralphs, Prinsloo, and Mcube emphasise the enabling institutional context – in this case, the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) at UWC – which was conducive to RPL policy and systems development and implementation. Their paper reports the collaborative research and development of an inclusive conceptual model for RPL, which has the power to explain and develop understanding of the design, artistry and challenges (or, as the authors aptly put it, the ‘inner workings’) of *RPL for access* at UWC and elsewhere. Furthermore, they discuss the policy development and implementation enablers and challenges for sustaining and expanding RPL programmes for inclusivity in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community Colleges in South Africa. One of the key findings reported in this paper is that, while relatively low *percentages* of students had benefited from the RPL processes at UWC, admissions into the programme increased over the years, and those entering the university via RPL tended to achieve at higher levels than those entering via traditional means.

**Paper 2**, by de Graaff and Jones, describes not only the implementation of RPL for access, but also RPL for granting exemptions, and for advanced standing at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in South Africa, which spanned from 2006 to 2017. The authors detail the approach taken to build capacity among academic staff members who deal with RPL. The development of expertise in RPL practitioners, they state, resulted in planned and qualification-specific processes enabling the institution to provide all forms of RPL. The paper also reflects on RPL students and their learning trajectories. In 2005, CPUT placed RPL within

an academic development unit – the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) – and appointed an RPL Lecturer to coordinate and implement RPL and oversee its quality assurance. The institution developed an RPL programme that became an elective module on RPL as part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (Teaching and Development) at NQF Level 8 – a standalone module for all academics involved in RPL since 2014. The purpose of the module is to develop academics' understanding of RPL and the philosophies underpinning it, which has enabled respective academic departments at the institution to develop detailed RPL plans for their qualifications and to accept and process RPL applications. The 2005-2017 data show 336 candidates admitted into various programmes in the Faculty of Business Management Sciences at CPUT, followed by Faculties of Health and Wellness (125), Informatics and Design (18), and Engineering (85). Of the 675 candidates admitted by CPUT, 292 completed their studies while 58 continued with subsequent qualifications.

Taking the RPL discourse further in **paper 3**, Deller explores the 'RPL-ing' of farmworkers and bankers in South Africa. The focus of this paper is on two 'very different' RPL interventions: the *practitioner-led RPL* in an Agricultural project and the *candidate-led RPL* in the Banking sector using an online and self-service portal with RPL advisory services. Deller notes that the interventions differed in terms of candidates, methodologies, and levels of candidate support. However, both were successful, indicating that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to RPL. The Chartall Business College, a registered and accredited private provider for corporate South Africa, led the interventions funded by particular Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Deller points out that the methodology adopted by the College has evolved from a paper-based practitioner-led process to a more online and learner-centred model. The agricultural project focused on Farmhands and small-scale Community Farmers with limited literacy but the desire to acquire partial or full qualifications. According to Deller, over 100 RPL practitioners underwent training as part of the Agricultural College-AgriSETA intervention. Moreover, 120 Farmhands, Community Framers, and Farm-workers were engaged in RPL, and most earned a part-qualification.

The Banking sector intervention on the other hand was for banking employees who needed full qualifications to remain employable in the context of legislation changes. Due to the high demand for RPL (over 5500 candidates) in this sector, the Chartall Business College turned to technology. Together with the BankSETA, Chartall designed and developed an online portal to administer both RPL and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT). The portal offered the promotion, pre-assessment, preparation, support, mediation and facilitation of RPL and CAT in the sector. Deller reports that 4000 people graduated with full qualifications through a combination of RPL, CAT, and additional (gap-fill) learning to remain employable within the sector.

Tennison's contribution, **paper 4**, examines a similar case study of RPL in the Food and Beverages (FoodBev) Manufacturing sector in South Africa. The role of the FoodBev Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) is to oversee qualifications in this sector. Tennison argues that RPL is limited in the sector for various reasons, including the challenge faced by Skills Development Providers to conceptualise and develop models and the related tools for RPL. As such, she explores the RPL model applied in this sector and discusses some challenges experienced therein. She further argues that employees in this sector have few to no qualifications, which renders them unable to progress within the education and workplace environments. As a result, the company Competence Performance Consulting Pty. Ltd. – a skills development provider accredited with the FoodBev Manufacturing SETA – identified the need for an RPL programme in the sector. An RPL process ran for six months to award qualifications to candidates who demonstrated the full range of knowledge, practical skills and applied competences in the packaging environment. The process had three phases: the first phase involved the application process, a check on literacy, numeracy and actual content knowledge; the second phase involved contact time and the collection of evidence to build a portfolio; the final phase comprised workplace observation. The RPL process was quality assured through moderation in line with FoodBev Manufacturing SETA policies. Nine candidates completed the programme and received certification from the

FoodBev Manufacturing SETA. Feedback from these candidates showed that the programme enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the packaging environment. Some challenges included the limited number of applications due to the scepticism towards the programme. Running the programme is capital intensive as facilitator and assessor costs add to sustainability concerns.

In **paper 5**, Lloyd describes the significance of building trust and professional capacity for the successful delivery of RPL. She poses two pertinent questions on RPL, 'Is RPL necessary?' Moreover, 'Who benefits from the implementation of RPL?' In response to the first question, Lloyd acknowledges the injustices of the *apartheid* system in which over 80% of the South African population could not enjoy equal rights, including in education, training and work. As such, she further notes, the NQF Act and related policy and regulatory frameworks reach out to those subjected to pre-1994 exclusionary and race-based policies by democratising education and training. The answer also lies in developing sustainable and enabling mechanisms to respond to globalisation and, more recently, the 'fourth industrial revolution' (4IR). Lloyd argues convincingly that RPL is an important mechanism to democratise education and training, and work opportunities, and to validate and recognise the knowledge, skills and competences existing in diverse contexts to improve lifelong learning in a fast-changing future of work characterised, as stated, by globalisation and 4IR.

In response to the second question of who benefits from the implementation of RPL, Lloyd signals that those previously and currently 'left behind' would cross over into opportunities to build professional and personal 'capital' within a democratised education, training and work system. Lloyd emphasised that, for this to happen, there must be trust in the policy environment and a conceptual confluence in approaches to RPL. The paper analyses two cases of RPL: first, 'RPL for promotion' at a workplace, where one candidate applied for a job in a national government department. The process proved to work for, (1) it drew on the candidate's experience, (2) the candidate was at the centre of the RPL process, (3) and positive and conducive climates enabled candidates to present authentic and credible evidence assessed against registered qualifications with

learning outcomes. The second case involved 'RPL for 'Professional Designations' for Sport Coaching in South Africa for candidates hoping to become Coaches and Coach Advisors. The designations were awarded at levels approved by the National Federations.

Similar to Lloyd, Kriel discusses, in **paper 6**, RPL 'against a professional designation' for employees who work at height under the auspices of the Institute for Work-at-Height (IWH) in South Africa. Kriel underlines the significance of RPL and the experience of tradespersons and other workers exposed to dangers while working at height. The IWH is a non-statutory professional body, which promotes public understanding of, and trust in, professions relating to Work-at-Height. The body also strives to advance the RPL practices for, and experiences of, people working in the sector while it advocates for Continuing Professional Development (CPD). IWH noted the absence of recognised qualifications in the Work-at-Height sector and that RPL processes could address this shortcoming. Kriel, therefore, presents RPL within a professional body context for the Built Environment, which is an approach related to the work of the IWH. Between 2012 and 2019, the IWH registered about 40,000 people for the Unit Standards for working at height. The IWH relied on a task-based RPL model, which emphasises the task at hand necessary to complete the job as well as streamlining and simplifying the recognition processes for prospective candidates. Moreover, the IWH engaged in three types of RPL initiatives: RPL for Scaffolders, RPL for Rope Access Practitioners, and RPL for Fall Protection Planners.

**Paper 8**, by Prinsloo, examines the Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL) process prescribed by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa. It outlines the revised national artisan development system, which includes RPL. According to Prinsloo, the Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) identified artisan development as a priority skills acquisition area. The Human Resource Development Council (HRDC)-led Artisan Development Technical Task Team (ADTTT) implemented this requirement and had an impact on artisan development, which saw the Chief

Directorate for National Artisan Development at DHET initiate an ARPL pilot project in 2012, targeting about 2000 people in the sector. This project became the basis for the implementation of a single national ARPL system. The challenges identified in the implementation of the national pilot included the extensive travelling needed in the absence of local sites, the lack of buy-in from employers, and a lack of communication by organised labour affecting employer/ employee understandings of ARPL. The candidates put forward sometimes had limited experience of the work as artisans. However, the most significant output from this pilot was a 'new competency-based' ARPL model based on the use of toolkits, which also led to the Ministerial approval of the Criteria and Guidelines for the implementation of ARPL in 2017.

In addition to the national pilot, the initial draft of the ARPL model and toolkits were piloted in the Western Cape Provincial Department of Economic Development and Tourism, which found that the project met its objectives and was a success due to, among other things, multi-stakeholder involvement. After the two pilots, the result was an official, 'Seven steps to becoming a qualified artisan'. These steps include RPL as an integral part of Trade Testing. Stakeholders committed to championing the new competency-based ARPL system. This system was benchmarked against the counterpart system in Mauritius. Prinsloo indicates that despite the successes of the initiatives, the ARPL systems in Mauritius and South Africa experience similar challenges: lack of candidate awareness and knowledge of the opportunities; lack of guidance and counselling; lack of ARPL capacity/ professionals; unsustainable funding, and a general lack of gap-fill training opportunities for upskilling where necessary.

Moldenhauer, Londt, and Fernandez's contribution, **paper 7**, analysed how Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), quality assurance and gainful employment interlink in a compliance-based accredited learning environment. This paper, the authors suggest, was informed by existing discrepancies between graduate attributes and the skills required within the workforce. Using the 'Model for Workplace Readiness', they recommended the implementation of an education strategy that is both of high quality and compliant within the WIL-accredited context. The

model is three-pronged and includes learner-engagement, client-engagement, and quality-assurance engagement. The authors present a case study on a Retail Readiness Programme (RRP) based on this model, which ran for eight weeks, to develop the candidates' skills on starting their businesses and to help them to understand the requirements of the Retail sector linked to learning outcomes. The learner-engagement model included recruitment, contracting, training, practical work, summative assessment, and an opportunity for gainful employment. The authors illustrate the numbers of learners recruited and enrolled in the programme, and those who completed it and gained employment. From the client-engagement perspective, store managers who were part of the study positively evaluated the efficacy of learners as employees. On the quality-assurance-engagement, the authors acknowledge the significance of quality assurance in occupational learning within the ambit of the NQF.

In **paper 9**, Mokwele explores the *Kha Ri Gude* Mass Literacy Campaign that sought to reach 4,7 million adults in South Africa, and whether and how this programme has contributed to inclusivity in education, training, development and work in the context of the NQF in the country. The paper provides a general overview of adult literacy from global, regional and national perspectives. It establishes that 2 974 117 adults completed the programme according to the records in the NLRD for the period 2008-2016. The author attributes this achievement to, among other things, the design, delivery and assessment model, and the external moderation/ verification of the programme. The paper has highlighted the inclusive nature of this adult literacy programme through the breakdown of learner achievements by gender, population group, province, and age range. It concludes by acknowledging that the programme served as a good practice and innovative Adult Education model with considerable impact on the literacy of the participating cohort. Furthermore, it clearly contributed to inclusivity within the context of the NQF.

**Paper 10**, by Wall, delves into an understudied, yet important area of research on learning and employment: the potential of infrastructure maintenance to tackle the scourge of poverty and unemployment. In this paper, Wall adopts a 'social

exchange' model, which speaks to both skills exchange and job creation in the maintenance of infrastructure. Employment is vital to the socio-economic and political well-being of society. The workplace, Wall notes, is an avenue for the acquisition or enhancement of task-specific skills. Low skills levels necessitate jobs that require these skills. The paper highlights that the infrastructure sector is a known driver of employment opportunities and learning at work. As such, maintenance workers are needed throughout the lifespan of that infrastructure. Wall, like other authors in this Bulletin, points out the importance of an innovative institutional model to manage the process, control the quality of maintenance, and address maintenance backlogs while advancing skills development and job creation. Implemented in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, the 'social exchange' model provides appropriate training, a quality management system, and procedures for WIL. In the schools' pilot project in which the social exchange approach was adopted, much of the water and sanitation infrastructure facilities in rural schools was found to be either dysfunctional or unserviceable. The lessons drawn here were that reliable income streams are vital for service providers and suppliers. The operations in the pilot have expanded to the provision of a wide range of operation and maintenance services; there has been an improvement in efficiency through the development of a mobile application for reporting service problems, information gathering and data collection. The programme has continued at 300 schools in the municipal districts of Buffalo City and *Amathole*, benefiting in the region of 100,000 learners.

Hartman and Tjemolane provide, in **paper 11**, a useful contribution to the accreditation of Workers' Education and inclusivity. The authors outline educational programmes for workers overseen by the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour (Ditsela). Ditsela is a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) established by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Federation of Unions in South Africa (FEDUSA), the National Council of Trade Unions (NATCU), the Confederation of South African Workers' Unions (CONSAWU), and the Ministry of Labour in 1996. It is a space

that engages with the complexities and development of Workers' Education through the development and strengthening of workers' intellectual and organisational capacity in the workplace, industry and political democracy. The organisation has spearheaded the provision of education, training and support services to trade union movements in South Africa. The access of workers to education that either provides them with a certificate or recognises their prior learning is essential, as is their right to determine the character of Workers' Education. Ditsela undertakes to achieve this balance through the recognition of workers' non-formal and informal learning, the provision of accredited programmes, assisting providers to be accredited, and the provision of other learning offerings that are not necessarily accredited. It encourages an approach that is a combination of informal, non-formal and formal learning programmes. The organisation has led the development of two formal qualifications: Ditsela's Advanced National Education Programme (DANLEP) and the Further Education and Training Certificate: Trade Union Practices (FETC: TUPQ) at NQF Level 4, in the form of a Learnership. DANLEP sought to provide access for workers to Higher Education through the Universities of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and Cape Town (UCT) from 2003 to 2008. DANLEP was relaunched at UCT and UWC in 2012. The recruitment of learners takes into account their involvement in their trade unions, experience or education, and school-leaving certificate or an RPL process. According to Hartman and Tjemolane, more than one thousand trade unionists have completed the programme, with 105 learners graduating from UWC and UCT in 2016/ 2017.

For the FETC: TUPQ, about 70% of learning takes place within the workplace and 30% through facilitated contact or classroom sessions. The qualification was piloted in 2011, with 50 learners of whom 37 attained the full qualification. For the second intake in 2014, 38 learners obtained the full qualification, as did 30 out of the 39 learners in 2018. The success of this Learnership lies with individual participants' determination, and the guidance provided by mentors. For Hartman and Tjemolane, it was necessary to incorporate RPL into the Learnership because many trade unionists have extensive knowledge, skills and experience in the

work they do, although they may not have the related certification. Ditsela strives to put lived experiences, non-formal, informal, and non-accredited Workers' Education firmly alongside formal and accredited programmes to enhance the academic curriculum. Participants in non-formal programmes have proven to be as successful, or more so, than their counterparts in the formal programmes.

**Paper 12**, by Van den Brande, provides an international perspective on validation: in Europe RPL is referred to as the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). The validation of non-formal and informal learning, Van den Brande observes, is high on the European agenda. For example, the 2012 European policy initiative around the validation of non-formal and informal learning remains an item for engagement and commitment. The European Commission and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) provide policy and practical advice to European Union (EU) Member States and stakeholders on the implementation of validation. Van den Brande noted that EU countries had committed to putting in place national arrangements for validation by the end of 2018. The paper specifically explores the role of validation of non-formal and informal learning for inclusion. Accordingly, it notes that there was considerable interest among stakeholders to share (bottom-up) practices and exchange ideas at the EU Validation Festival on 14-15 June 2018 in Brussels and the VPL Biennales of 2017 and 2019. According to Van den Brande, governments dominate the coordination of validation, while education and training institutions lead in different aspects of the process, including identification, documentation, assessment, and certification – and the 'third sector' (Non-Governmental Organisations [NGOs], NPOs, and others) also contribute, especially in terms of advice and candidate support.

European Inventory research (European Commission, 2019) revealed that 35 of the 36 EU countries had validation arrangements in at least one sector of education, work, or the third sector, although their approaches to the validation process may differ. In 2018, 19 of the countries – compared to 14 in 2016 – made available validation initiatives to, and targeted, disadvantaged groups, which speaks to inclusivity (European Commission, 2018; 2016). In 16 countries,

initiatives supporting the validation of the knowledge and skills of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) were in place: these were under development in seven of 28 EU countries, with others (12) yet to establish them. Most countries (21) provided for *adults with low skills levels*. However, the highest number of countries (23) provided validation for the '*long-term unemployed*' group. Notably, about eight of the countries had validation opportunities for migrants and refugees. Engaging individual learners, particularly adults with low skills levels, the NEETs, refugees, migrants and people in far-flung rural areas, is essential. Van den Brande emphasises that guidance services, information sharing and the need to put the learner at the centre of validation, are central in the EU validation policies and practices. The challenge is that VPL certificates are perceived to be unequal because they are not obtained through formal education (thus there is a lack of parity of esteem). However, 24 countries reported at least one subsector of education where the certificates obtained through validation are not different from those acquired through formal education. Van den Brande notes that there is a need to develop further the role of validation practitioners, particularly for guidance and assessment in validation. The EU role-players are working towards building a Community of Validation Practitioners and professionals. Funding is flagged as being essential. Achieving the validation goals depends on the validation arrangements in each country, and on the existing financial structures and traditions.

Carlsen, Husted, Troelsen, and Jakobsen look into VPL in the Nordic countries, with specific reference to Denmark, in **paper 13**. Education and training are amongst the most critical areas of cooperation across the Nordic countries. Making the knowledge, skills, and competences learned non-formally and informally, visible, and valuing them, has long been on the Nordic agenda. The authors acknowledge a study that discussed Nordic countries' strengths within interdisciplinary cooperation in order to bring people and talents together in ways that generate inspiration and innovation across professional groups, industries, and generations. This study described and compared validation policies and practices across the different Nordic countries and how these played out in three

sectors: Adult Education, the labour market, and the third sector. The research found that there are similarities as well as differences between the countries regarding the development of validation policy and practices. The Nordic Expert Network on Validation, which has been active since 2005, defines challenges in the work of validation that needed tackling through cooperation among the countries and with inspiration from each other, although each country follows its own paths when developing its VPL systems. VPL has been on the national agenda for 20 years in Denmark, and a legal framework has been in place since 2007. Formal educational institutions have the authority to provide complete VPL processes, including assessment and recognition. According to Carlsen, Husted, Troelsen and Jakobsen there is also a pre-VPL phase that includes the information sharing, identification, and guidance provided to prospective candidates. The educational institutions can enable access to formal education, tailor a study programme or award credits for classes or competence certificates, through validation. Validation initiatives find expression in forums such as the VPL Biennales. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> VPL Biennale in 2019, delegates developed and endorsed the *Berlin Declaration on VPL* that addressed the requirements for VPL systems and gave VPL communities in the EU clear guidance.

**Paper 14** by Duvekot and Duvekot explores the value of the human capital brought by refugees and migrants ('newcomers') in Europe. The paper focuses on the impact of VPL implemented in the context of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to make Higher Education programmes accessible to and inclusive for, migrants and refugees. The authors use a case-study analysis of 43 in-depth interviews of newcomers who were part of the *Erasmus+ Project: Validation for Inclusion of New Citizens in Europe* (VINCE). VPL enables and facilitates lifelong learning through, (1) the validation of learners' prior learning achievements; and (2) the creation of further learning strategies for them. The VPL process includes sequential phases: identification, documentation, assessment, and certification. The authors suggest a fifth phase: VPL follow-up, which entails activities in learning and work that enable the accredited, personal learning outcomes to be practically utilised.

Duvekot and Duvekot undertook a country-level analysis and individual-level analysis. At the country-level, they analysed data on legislation, funding and facilities (such as information provision and professional staff capacity) favouring VPL as an entry-point for newcomers in HEIs in 37 countries where the five phases were applicable. At the individual-level, 43 cases showed that individuals experienced the VPL process in more or less same manner seeking recognition, validation and accreditation in their new/host country. The individual-level analytical aspects included agency, the affordance of VPL by HEIs, information sharing and guidance, the five consecutive phases and ownership of one's learning outcomes. The analysis of the data on the individuals showed varied outcomes, including the slowness in the HEI implementation of validation, and the hesitation of newcomers to engage in the VPL processes without first receiving information and guidance. On the other hand, the empowerment, educational attainment, and career prospects emerged as benefits of VPL. In addition, candidates had similar challenges in formulating and providing evidence of their prior learning experiences; reflecting on their learning experiences strengthened their positions in their dialogue on further learning within the HEIs and workplaces. Moreover, the creation of Portfolios of Evidence of prior learning experiences and the personal ownership of lifelong learning enhanced the VPL processes.

The authors point out that the supportive and facilitative role of NGOs not only in funding but also in providing information and guidance for VPL cannot go unnoticed. Overall, validation brings about returns on investment for newcomers and host countries. The VPL assessments help to connect all stakeholders in the validation process. This paper draws several conclusions. Firstly, the provision of information and guidance services for VPL is essential for the utilisation of VPL by target groups. Secondly, the responsibilities of all VPL actors need to be linked with the specific purposes for engaging in VPL processes. Thirdly, the objectives and impact of VPL in HEIs are tied to rationales of educational benefit, employability, human resource development, and lifelong learning. Fourth, the expertise of VPL staff (portfolio guides, advisors and assessors) is significant for

achieving maximum awareness of the value of personal learning experiences when newcomers reach out to HEIs in their new/host countries.

## **SOME LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PAPERS IN THIS BULLETIN**

The papers in this volume present some lessons and recurring themes. **RPL** dominates the discourse on inclusivity in the context of the NQF. The Bulletin also sheds light on successful initiatives in areas such as **WIL, Adult Education, skills development/ upskilling**, the **accreditation** of Workers' Education, and **professionalisation** in sectors. A round-up of the papers demonstrates **various forms of RPL**: for instance, RPL for access; RPL for granting exemptions; RPL for advanced standing; RPL routes to professional designations; RPL for promotion in the workplace; and RPL with specific reference to artisan development, Artisan RPL (ARPL).

A substantial number of papers in the volume highlight the **need for, and actual RPL models** to 'make visible' the knowledge, skills and experience acquired through non-formal and informal learning – and/or for **upskilling** and **professionalisation**. The general understanding is clearly that the skills gained non-formally and informally are abundant but are under-utilised in different sectors and contexts. In other instances, upskilling is needed.

The papers also speak to the **enablers of RPL/ VPL/ upskilling** in different sectors and contexts. Several papers speak to the need to build RPL capacity among institutions' staff, and how having dedicated staff and resources has helped. Others point to the need for the training and professionalisation of RPL practitioners, and role-players taking responsibility for their roles. Yet others note the need for conceptual confluence in the approaches to RPL/ VPL – as such, shared understandings of RPL have enabled, and will continue to enable, coherent policy development and implementation within and across countries.

**Institutional settings** are critically important for the success and inclusive nature of RPL processes. A number of noteworthy examples of public and private

– and public-private – entity structures at the heart of lifelong learning, RPL practices, and upskilling/ professionalisation initiatives, for years and decades in some instances, feature in this Bulletin.

**Quality assurance** systems have to be in place to inspire trust, integrity, and confidence in the processes and outcomes of RPL/ VPL and/or upskilling/ professionalisation, and the papers in this Bulletin place great emphasis on such quality. Some entities featured rely on existing policies, or alternatively, have developed dedicated policies for such. Other entities oversaw the quality assurance in the training of employees, and/or have designed and developed special tools to assist individuals and/or groups in achieving the desired qualifications through inclusive processes. Others have worked hard to promote public understanding of, and trust in, the processes that support inclusivity.

Each of the papers highlights the **achievements** in its context. These achievements include the structures developed and the communities formed to enhance inclusivity. In other instances, authors report the development of policies, criteria and guidelines. In several instances, the papers note the relatively high numbers of successful RPL candidates, or people included – in some universities, SETAs, and professional body and work contexts.

In many of the papers, the initiatives towards inclusivity focus on adults with low skills levels, people not in employment, education or training (NEET), and migrants and refugees in their new countries. Some of these initiatives sought to empower migrants and refugees through the recognition of their prior learning – whether formal, non-formal, and informal – for further education and career prospects. Others sought similarly, to enable adults in their own countries, to further their learning and work pathways through RPL and/or skills development. The ways in which furthering skills development and/or upskilling feature in the papers show innovative models, structures, funding, and at least some measures of success. Various forums such as conferences and workshops of different kinds assisted the development of national and/or institutional arrangements, policies, practices and networks for inclusivity.

**Common challenges** emerged in the implementation of RPL, VPL, and other inclusivity initiatives across the different contexts. Among other things, there was initial – and continuing – scepticism towards RPL, VPL and innovative models for upskilling adults with low skills levels. RPL/ VPL/ upskilling initiatives are resource-intensive: facilitators, assessors, practitioners and others need recruiting, training, and different kinds of support. Sometimes there is a lack of buy-in from some of the stakeholders involved. Other instances showed lack of awareness and/or understanding, and/or shortfalls in the capacity to provide advice and counselling. Qualifications and/or skills acquired through alternative routes do not necessarily enjoy ‘parity of esteem’. These challenges are not unique to particular countries or continents.

## **IN CLOSING**

In all, the 14 papers in the volume present a rich array of policies and implementation; research findings, pilots and initiatives; models, conceptualisations and innovations. Readers may choose to adopt, and build on, what they have read in these pages.



## Author Information

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The information in this section is alphabetical by author surname.

### **DR HEIDI BOLTON**

Dr Heidi Bolton has been the Research Director at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for over a decade. Her responsibilities include conducting and overseeing research towards the implementation and further development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa. She oversees and participates in events and publications to disseminate the findings, leads and is involved in the related developmental work, and provides or oversees evidence-based policy advice and inputs. She has co-led, with the research leaders in the partner organisations, seven long-term SAQA Research Partnerships that focused respectively on assessment; the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL); work and learning pathways for sustainable development; Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College lecturers; lifelong learning and transitioning learners; learning pathways; and articulation between TVET, Higher Education, and work. She co-led the development of SAQA's RPL policy and criteria in 2013 and 2019. Previously, she was Senior Researcher at *Umalusi*, Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training; publisher of school and college textbooks in the national system; and teacher of school, university, and adult learners. She holds a PhD in the Sociology of Education from the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa. Contact details: [hbolton@saqa.co.za](mailto:hbolton@saqa.co.za) or [saquaresearch@gmail.com](mailto:saquaresearch@gmail.com)

### **MS ANTRA CARLSEN**

Ms Antra Carlsen is the Head-Coordinator of the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL), established by the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) in 2005. The network unites all the Nordic countries and works according to the strategy of the NCM on e.g. adult educators' competence development, the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL), guidance counselling, and innovations in education.

High levels of achievement characterise the NVL; the organisation has become an established programme under the NCM and has created cooperation relationships with more than 200 education organisations in the Nordic countries. From 1995-2005, Ms Carlsen was a Project Leader for Nordic-Baltic cooperation under the NCM. Her fields of responsibility included training for Adult Education practitioners, civic society development, and partnership building between governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). She holds a Bachelor's Degree in English Philology from the University of Latvia. Contact details: [antr@via.dk](mailto:antr@via.dk)

### **MS FREDERIKA DE GRAAFF**

Ms Frederika de Graaff is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Lecturer at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED); she has held this position since 2005. She coordinates the implementation of RPL within CPUT and has been instrumental in the development of the RPL policies of CPUT. She places emphasis on the capacity building and knowledge management around RPL within CPUT. To this end she lectures in the RPL module of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education: Teaching and Learning, and runs workshops on RPL as a practice. She supports the academic staff members at CPUT with the planning of RPL processes and assessments. Working closely with the Registry, she oversees the administration of RPL. Her research focuses on the comparison of knowledge from workplaces, with the interpretation of knowledge within a University of Technology. She is currently a doctoral candidate registered at the University of Cape Town (UCT). She is involved in the Short Courses offerings at CPUT, and is specifically interested in the links between the short courses and RPL. Contact details: [degraaff@cput.ac.za](mailto:degraaff@cput.ac.za)

### **DR KAREN DELLER**

Dr Karen Deller is a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) practitioner with an accredited and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)-registered

private provider of both higher and occupational qualifications. Her history with RPL started with the ambitious Services Sector Education and Training Authority (Services SETA) project (2004) to RPL 1000 domestic workers. The project was not a great success and taught her a great deal about how *not* to do RPL. Since then, her RPL practices have evolved to consider the multiple variables in the RPL context concerned – the candidates, the sector, the employers and the available resources. This understanding has allowed her to create practicable RPL solutions for each project. The BankSETA RPL and CAT (Credit Accumulation and Transfer) portal described in this Bulletin is a world first and allows RPL to be taken to scale using technology. This was recognised at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) Biennale in Berlin, Germany in May 2019, where she presented the portal to an international audience, and received an award for it. She has been involved in the design and management of RPL processes for over 20 years, and has supported over 200,000 successful RPL candidates over these years. Contact details: karen@chartall.co.za

### **MS ROSA DUVEKOT**

Ms Rosa Duvekot is a researcher for the European Centre for the Valuation of Prior Learning (<https://ec-vpl.nl>) and is an autonomous film producer. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Film Studies and Visual Culture (University of Antwerp, Belgium). Contact details: rduvekot@gmail.com

### **DR RUUD DUVEKOT**

Dr Ruud Duvekot chairs the European Centre for the Valuation of Prior Learning (<https://ec-vpl.nl>) and is Associate Professor at Utrecht University of Applied Sciences. He holds a PhD from Utrecht University in the Netherlands. In his thesis, he examined the impact of the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) on the shifting learning paradigm from top-down, education-steered learning to bottom-up steered, personalised learning. Contact details: rduvekot@gmail.com

## **MS DOROTHY FERNANDEZ**

Ms Dorothy Fernandez works in the field of Adult and Vocational Learning in South Africa. She is the Specialised Projects Manager for Omni Human Resources (HR) Consulting, a registered and accredited private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Assessment Centre in South Africa. She has studied in the fields of Occupationally Directed Education, Training and Development Practices. Her research interests include Operations in Education, Training and Development, Project Management, Change Management and e-learning practices. Contact details: dot@omnihrc.com

## **MS GRISCHELDA HARTMAN**

Ms Grishelda Hartman is the Programme Coordinator for the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour (Ditsela's) Workers' Education and has worked for over 20 years in the Labour movement, as an organiser, educator and gender coordinator/ activist. Her key areas of work are the delivery of education and training; research and the advocacy of women and gender issues; gender and women's leadership development in trade unions; and arranging education and topical seminars/ other discussion forums. She is particularly interested in Adult and Workers' Education and the role that education can play in advancing women's position in society, and trade unions. She has written on gender-based violence in the workplace, and contributed to a book on Workers' Education that focuses on trade union women entering university. She holds an undergraduate degree from the Nelson Mandela University (NMU), and an Advanced Diploma in Adult Education, an Honours Degree in Women and Gender Studies, and is currently completing her Master's Degree – all from the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Contact details: grischelda@ditsela.org.za

## **MS BODIL HUSTED**

Ms Bodil Lomholt Husted is the Head of the Research and Development Programme for the Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) at the National Knowledge (NVR) Centre for Lifelong Learning at VIA University College, Denmark. She is involved in cross-sectoral research and development for lifelong learning – with a strong focus on individuals' transitions in life. Due to her position as Head of NVR, she takes part in a broad range of VPL network activities, including national, Nordic and European research and development projects. She is a Danish member of the NVL Expert Network for Validation. She holds a Degrees in Theology and Education from the University of Copenhagen, and a Master's Degree in 'learning processes' from the University of Aalborg – both of which are in Denmark. Contact details: [bohu@via.dk](mailto:bohu@via.dk)

## **MS ANN ELSEBETH JAKOBSEN**

Ms Ann Elsebeth Jakobsen has Master's Degrees in Danish Language, Literature and Psychology; and in Guidance, from the Universities of Aalborg and Aarhus, respectively. She is a Lecturer at the Institute of Pedagogy at VIA University College in Denmark. She is also a Study Counsellor, and Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) Assessor. Recently, she spent seven years designing and implementing VPL policy and processes. She is also a researcher and interested in VPL and the possibilities for the inclusion of 'newcomers' (migrants and refugees) in Higher Education. Contact details: [aeja@via.dk](mailto:aeja@via.dk)

## **DR BARBARA JONES**

Dr Barbara Jones has a Master's Degree in Education (Curriculum Development) from the University of Cape Town (UCT). She has a long history in Adult Education, with strong interests in learning theory and lifelong learning. She has taught a range of courses in the UCT Adult Education Department up to Master's Degree level and also taught research methods and supervised Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) Bachelor of Technology (B Tech) Graphic Design

student research projects for ten years. She has considerable experience as a freelance Higher Education researcher with the Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where she worked on projects that focused on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Flexible Learning and Teaching Practices (FLTP). She has worked in the Curriculum Development Unit of the Fundani Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at CPUT since 2018 where she has been assisting academic departments to develop their suite of Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)-aligned qualifications, and facilitating workshops and developments in innovative curriculum design. Contact details: bemjones@gmail.com or jonesb@cput.ac.za

## **DR ALTI KRIEL**

Dr Alti Kriel is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Institute for Work at Height (IWH), which comprises a Trade Association and a Professional Body. She holds under- and postgraduate Degrees in Education and Theology, and a PhD from the University of Pretoria in South Africa. After teaching at school level, she moved into Vocational Education and Training (VET). She promotes industry involvement in the development and delivery of the curricula for Occupational and Vocational Qualifications. She has represented colleges on several committees for the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in one of the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) under the SAQA Act. She served as Director: Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) and VET at Umalusi, Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, and as Quality Development Manager: Learnerships and Skills Programmes, at the Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA). While at the SETA, she led a 27-school project across South Africa's nine provinces, to develop teachers to prepare 540+ Grade 10 learners, over three years, for the world of work, using Feuerstein's 'mediated learning experience' (MLE) and 'Theory of Cognitive Modifiability'. She subsequently trained others, across countries, in these approaches. After a period, the IWH Trade Association approached her to

assist in establishing a professional body for registration with SAQA. She initially assisted only with the development of policies and procedures, but soon found herself at the heart of the developments in this unique and little-known industry. She has since taken up a full range of duties at the IWH. Contact details: ceo@ifwh.co.za or manager@profbody.co.za

### **DR SHIRLEY ANNE LLOYD**

Dr Shirley Lloyd is currently a consultant in the areas of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and National Qualifications Framework (NQF) research. She held the position of Director: NQF in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in South Africa for almost a decade. She was responsible for the overarching support and advice to the then-Minister of Higher Education and Training (MHET) on all matters relating to the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of NQF policies and practices. She has a Philosophiae Doctorate in the Management of Technology and Innovation (MOTI) from the Da Vinci Institute, Johannesburg, South Africa. Contact details: shirleylloyd41@gmail.com

### **MS CINDY LONDT**

Ms Cindy Londt works in the field of Adult and Vocational Learning in South Africa. She is the Operations Executive for Omni Human Resources (HR) Consulting, a registered and accredited private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Assessment Centre in South Africa. She has studied in the fields of Occupationally Directed Education, Training and Development Practices. Her research interests include Operations in Education, Training and Development, Contact Centre Operations, Project Management and e-learning practices. Contact details: cindy@omnihrc.com

## **MS RETHABILE MCUBE**

Ms Rethabile Mcube was born and raised in kuTsolo in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, from whence she gets most of her African philosophy and inspiration. After working for some years in the Retail and Tourism sectors, she successfully completed the Portfolio Development Course (PDC), one of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Following this process, in 2011, she entered the Bachelor of Arts (BA) programme at UWC. She completed her BA Degree with three majors in Philosophy, History and English Literature, and, in 2016, took up a contract post in the RPL Office at UWC, as Front-Line Advisor and Administrator. She is currently a permanent staff member at UWC, employed as an RPL Practitioner with advising, mentoring and administrative responsibilities. She has just completed her final year of study at the university, for an Advanced Diploma in Education, Training and Development: Adult Education. She is currently a candidate in the Master's Degree in Education (M Ed) programme, where she aims to pursue her abiding interest in RPL within the framework of an African epistemology and philosophy. Contact details: [rmcube@uwc.ac.za](mailto:rmcube@uwc.ac.za)

## **MR TSHEPHO MOKWELE**

Mr Tshepho Mokwele is the Assistant Director: Research in the Research Directorate at the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) where his work centres on conducting, reporting, and coordinating research towards the implementation and further development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in the country. Prior to joining SAQA, he worked as a Junior Researcher in the Research Use and Impact Assessment (RIA) Unit at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) where he worked on, and contributed to, research projects on impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation; knowledge brokering; and issues in education and training, amongst others. He was also a contributing writer for current affairs online platforms such as *News24 South Africa* and *The Daily Journalist*. He holds a Master of Arts in Political Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand and is currently doing a PhD at the same

institution. His research interests include, but are not limited to, the research-policy nexus, public policy and evidence-based decision-making, impact assessment/ evaluation, and education and training in the NQF context. Contact details: TMokwele@saqa.co.za or Tshephomokwele@gmail.com

## **MS LIZE MOLDENHAUER**

Ms Lize Moldenhauer works in the field of Adult and Vocational Learning in South Africa. She is the Managing Director of Omni Human Resources (HR) Consulting, a registered and accredited private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Assessment Centre in South Africa. She is also the Chief Executive Officer for the SC Training Company, another registered and accredited provider. She has studied in the fields of Occupationally Directed Education, Training and Development Practices. Her research interests include Contact Centre Management, Human Resources, e-learning practices and occupational learning. Contact details: lize@omnihrc.com

## **DR FLORUS PRINSLOO**

Dr Florus Prinsloo has a Postgraduate Diploma in Knowledge and Information Systems Management from Stellenbosch University in South Africa, a Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from Henley Management College in the United Kingdom (UK), and a DPhil in Leadership in Performance and Change, from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He worked for 24 years in the private sector, in marketing and training in manufacturing. Since May 2004, he was involved with skills development at the Department of Labour, the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Western Cape Government (South Africa) and the British Council in South Africa. He also served on the National Skills Authority (NSA) and the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (HRDC-SA). He currently works as a Workplace-Based Learning coach to help people to help themselves, and consults in the field of his passion – a modern 21<sup>st</sup>

Century South African Apprenticeship System for all occupations in the country. Contact details: doc@synapticmentor.co.za ([https://nadsc.dhet.gov.za/A21#/\)](https://nadsc.dhet.gov.za/A21#/)

### **MR NIGEL PRINSLOO**

Mr Nigel Prinsloo is a lecturer and researcher at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town, South Africa. He specialises in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). He works at the UWC Institute for Post-School Studies (IPSS), which brings together research, teaching and social engagement in the areas of Adult Education, Higher Education, and Vocational Education. The creation of the IPSS recognises the critical role of Post-School Education and Training (PSET) in addressing South Africa's development needs, and the challenges that inhabit youth and adults from achieving their highest potential. He has been an RPL practitioner at UWC for over a decade, and has contributed in a number of policy forums related to the development and implementation of national RPL policy. He is currently completing his doctoral research at UWC. Contact details: nprinsloo@uwc.ac.za

### **MR ALAN RALPHS**

Mr Alan Ralphs is a teacher, lecturer and lifelong learning specialist with an extensive background in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy development, research and programme implementation. He recently retired from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), where he coordinated the RPL programmes and services for 13 years. He is one of the co-authors and editors of the peer-reviewed book *RPL as Specialised Pedagogy: Crossing the Lines* (Cape Town and Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) Press, 2016). Contact details: amralphs@gmail.com

**MS COLETTE TENNISON**

Ms Colette Tennison is an independent consultant in the field of workplace education and training. She has a particular interest in working with Skills Development Providers and organisations to assist them in developing learning programmes and curricula. Her research interests include the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), occupational and vocational knowledge, and identifying best practices in the field of education and training. She is currently completing her doctoral research through the University of Cape Town, focusing on RPL in a workplace context. Contact details: [colette@southwoodskilldev.co.za](mailto:colette@southwoodskilldev.co.za)

**MR LEBALLO TJEMOLANE**

Mr Leballo Tjemolane is a doctoral candidate at the University of the Western Cape's (UWC's) Department of Women and Gender Studies. He is especially interested in the area of masculinity/ies in the context of post-*apartheid* South Africa; social transformation; and interrogating societal issues like gender-based violence, sexuality, and reproductive health. He has Honours and Master's Degrees in 'Gender, Religion and Health', and 'Religion and Social Transformation', respectively, from the University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN), and completed his Bachelor's Degree in Theology at the St. Joseph's Theological Institute in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. He entered the Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour (Ditsela) as an intern under the auspices of the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), focusing on research and the Trade Union Practice Qualification (TUPQ) Learnership programme. Contact details: [leballotj@hotmail.com](mailto:leballotj@hotmail.com)

**MS CHARLOTTE TROELSEN**

Ms Charlotte Troelsen has Master's Degrees in the Social Sciences and Psychology from Aalborg University, and in Guidance from Aarhus University, both in Denmark. She lectures at VIA University College, and is a Study

Counsellor, and Validation of Prior learning (VPL) Assessor. She is involved in the design and implementation of VPL procedures and processes. She is a researcher with an interest in VPL, and newcomers' possibilities of inclusion in Higher Education. She is, moreover, a researcher with an interest in the Internship tutorial. Contact details: [ctr@via.dk](mailto:ctr@via.dk)

## **PROFESSOR DR GODELIEVE VAN DEN BRANDE**

Professor Dr Godelieve (Lieve) Van den Brande is a Guest Lecturer in Educational Sciences at the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*, and has been Senior Expert: Skills and Qualifications in the Directorate: General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, at the European Commission. Based on a long-standing research background, she has been until July 2019, responsible for developing and implementing the European Union (EU) Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. Prior to this, she worked for over 30 years at the European Commission on e-Learning, the frameworks for and assessment of, digital and entrepreneurial competences; pedagogics and didactics for the use of technologies for learning; open education towards open innovation; the e-maturity of learning organisations, and spent several years in research and development in the Social Sciences. She graduated in Educational and Psychological Sciences as well as in Teacher Education at the University of Brussels (B) and holds a doctoral degree in Educational Sciences from the University of Liège (B). She is also a Fellow of the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*. Contact details: [godelieve.van-den-brande@ec.europa.eu](mailto:godelieve.van-den-brande@ec.europa.eu)

## **PROFESSOR KEVIN WALL**

Kevin Wall was a Built Environment Fellow of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) until 2014; he is a Civil Engineer and Town Planner. He is an Extraordinary Professor at the University of Pretoria, a Fellow of the South African Academy of Engineering, and a non-executive board member of a municipal entity, the Ekurhuleni Water Care Company (ERWAT). From 2014 to 2018, he served as a Ministerial appointee to the Council of the King

Hints Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, and recently completed his time as Infrastructure Advisor to the Inter-governmental Relations Branch of the National Treasury. A Past President of the South African Institution of Civil Engineering (SAICE), he has won its Gold Medal and the Lifetime Award of the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF) – both awards being the highest in the country, in the Civil Engineering, and Science and Technology fields, respectively. He led the research and co-authored the three South African Institution for Civil Engineering (SAICE) Infrastructure Report Cards published in 2006, 2011 and 2017. Much of his work over the last two decades focused on the effectiveness of government spending on infrastructure, and ways to improve the quality, reliability and sustainability of that infrastructure. Importantly, he has linked this work to skills development for adults with low skills levels. Contact details: kevin.wall@up.ac.za and kevinwall468@gmail.com



## Acronyms

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4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
A21	Apprenticeship of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century
AARP	Alternative Admissions Research Project
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ACRP	Association of Christian Religious Practitioners
ADTTT	Artisan Development Technical Task Team
AET	Adult Education and Training
AfDB	African Development Bank
AgriSETA	Agricultural Sector Education Training Authority
ALH	Autobiographical Learning History
AQP	Assessment Quality Partner
AQVN	African Qualifications Verification Network
ARPL	Artisan Recognition of Prior Learning
BA	Bachelor of Arts
BankSETA	Banking Sector Education and Training Authority
B Tech	Bachelor of Technology
B HSc	Bachelors of Health Science
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CATHSSETA	Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Sector Education and Training Authority
CBMT	Competency-Based Modular Training
CD	Community Development
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle)
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEP	Community of Expert Practitioners
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
CETC	Community Education and Training College
CHAT	Cultural Historical Activity Theory
CHE	Council on Higher Education

CHEC	Cape Higher Education Consortium
CHED	Centre for Higher Education Development
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
CUT	Central University of Technology
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CVET	Continuing Vocational Education and Training
DANLEP	Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour (DITSELA's) Advanced National Education Programme
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DCEO	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
DEDAT	Department of Economic Development and Tourism (Provincial)
DEL	Department of Employment and Labour
DENOSA	Democratic Nursing Association of South Africa
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DITSELA	Development Institute for Training, Support and Education for Labour
DLL	Division for Lifelong Learning
DoD	Department of Defence
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DoT	Department of Transport
DPSA	Department of Public Service Administration
DQP	Development Quality Partner
DSD	Department of Social Development
DTTC	Diesel Traction Training Centre
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
DWS	Department of Water and Sanitation
EC	European Commission
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education For All

EISA	External Integrated Summative Assessment
ELRC	Education and Labour Relations Council
EMC	Emergency Medical Care
EOPPEP	National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (Greece)
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ETDPSETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
EU	European Union
FAIS	Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services
FB&MS	Faculty of Business and Management Sciences
FEDUSA	Federation of Unions of South Africa
FEM	Federated Employers' Mutual Assurance Company
FET	Further Education and Training
FETC	Further Education and Training Certificate
FLP	Flexible Learning Pathways
FLTP	Flexible Learning and Teaching Provision
FMF	Fees Must Fall
FoodBev SETA	Food and Beverages Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority
FSB	Financial Services Board
FSCA	Financial Services Conduct Authority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
GHS	General Household Survey
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HR	Human Resources

HRD	Human Resource Development
HRDCSA	Human Resource Development Council of South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ICCE	International Council for Coaching Excellence
IFFT	Interim Federation Task Team
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INDLELA	Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment Skills and Labour Assessments
IOP	Institutional Operating Plan
IOSM	Institute of Safety Management
IPSS	Institute for Post-School Studies
IRATA	International Rope Access Association
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IWH	Institute for Work-at-Height
JIPSA	Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition
LAMP	Literary Assessment and Monitoring Group
LAP	Learner Assessment Portfolio
LMIP	Labour Market Intelligence Project
LMS	Learning Management System
LSO	Labour Service Organisation
LTCDD	Long-Term Coach Development
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MCL	Ministerial Committee on Literacy
M Ed	Master of Education
MerSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering, and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
MHET	Minister of Higher Education and Training
MHEST	Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology
MIASA	Marine Industry Association Southern Africa
MIS	Management Information System
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoC	Memorandum of Cooperation

Mol	Memorandum of Incorporation
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTA	Manpower Training Act
MQA	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
MQA	Mining Qualifications Authority
MR-U	Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research
NABS	National Articulation Baseline Study
NACTU	National Council of Trade Unions
NADSC	National Artisan Development Support Centre
NAE	National Agency for Education
NAMB	National Artisan Moderation Body
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NBT	National Benchmark Test
NCM	Nordic Council of Ministers
NCV	National Certificate: Vocational
ND	National Diploma
NDP	National Development Plan
NF	National Federation
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NEPI	National Education Policy Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHC	National Higher Certificate
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
NPPSET	National Plan for the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
NSF	National Skills Fund
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NTSI	National Training Strategy Initiative

NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
NVL	Nordic Network for Adult Learning
OAED	Manpower Employment Organisation of Greece
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFO	Organising Framework for Occupations
OHD	Occupations in High Demand
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
PDC	Portfolio Development Course
PE-TVET	Port Elizabeth Technical and Vocational Education and Training College
PES	Public Employment Services
PoE	Portfolio of Evidence
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Council
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
QMS	Quality Management System
R&D	Research and Development
RAFAA	Rope Access and Fall Arrest Association
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RRP	Retail Readiness Programme
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RTMC	Road Traffic Management Corporation
SACPCMP	South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAEMA	Specialist Access Engineering and Manufacturers Association
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
SAICE	South African Institution of Civil Engineering
SAIOSH	South African Institute of Occupational Safety and Health
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SANLI	South African National Literacy Initiative
SANS	South African National Standard

SAPS	South African Police Service
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASCA	South African Sports Coaching Association
SASCOC	South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SITA	State Information Technology Agency
SONA	State of the Nation Address
STATSSA	Statistics South Africa
SWOP	Society, Work and Politics Institute
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TAP	Test for Access and Placement
TELP	Tertiary Education Linkages Project
TTC	Trade Test Centre
TUPQ	Trade Union Practices Qualification
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UCT	University of Cape Town
UK	United Kingdom
UMALUSI	Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNESCO-UIL	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation Institute for Lifelong Learning
UNISA	University of South Africa
UoT	University of Technology
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America
USAf	Universities South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VAE	Validation of Acquired Experience ( <i>Validation des acquis de l'expérience</i> )
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VINCE	Validation for Inclusion of New Citizens in Europe
VNFIL	Validation of Non-formal and Informal Lear

VPL	Validation of Prior Learning
W&R SETA	Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority
WBL	Work-Based Learning
WEF	World Economic Forum
WIL	Work Integrated Learning
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WRC	Water Research Commission





Telephone: 012 431 5000

Facsimile: 012 431 5147

Helpdesk: 086 010 3188

Website: [www.saqqa.org.za](http://www.saqqa.org.za)

Email: [saqainfo@saqa.org.za](mailto:saqainfo@saqa.org.za)