



## **DIE AFRIKAANSE PROTESTANTSE AKADEMIE NPC**

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**INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ON  
RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) AND  
CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER (CAT)**

Policy Owner	Board of The APA
Responsibility	Quality Commissioner and Quality Committee
Status	Approved
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## A. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process where students articulate and demonstrate relevant learning acquired through life and work experiences as well as informal learning programmes and where this learning is evaluated and acknowledged.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is rooted within the context of life-long learning as it provides alternative routes of access to higher education. It is the process through which non-formal and/or informal learning are measured, evaluated and “translated” into their perceived formal equivalents for recognition across different contexts. Its intended outcome is the recognition of such prior learning for the purposes of alternative access and admission to higher education learning programmes, or for advancement within qualification programmes.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the identification, assessment and acknowledgement of an individual’s skills and knowledge within the context of a specific qualification, irrespective of how and where they have been acquired. It is the acknowledgement of skills, competencies, knowledge and work ethos obtained through formal training, on-the-job experience and life experience when measured against specific learning outcomes.

### 2. PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 RPL, as defined nationally, applies to all informal or non-formal learning only.
- 2.2 The RPL process is designed to grant access. Access is granted for
  - 2.2.1 entry requirements of a qualification in case where applicants do not hold a National Senior Certificate (NSC).
  - 2.2.2 Exemption from modules/and or courses that contribute towards a specific qualification.
- 2.3 The 50/10-rule applies for RPL at the Institution. RPL cannot be used to grant an individual exemption from more than 50 percent of the modules/courses required for any particular qualification. A person must always obtain 50 percent of a qualification at the institution. **Not more than 10 percent of a cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process.**
- 2.4 Full qualifications may not be awarded on RPL.
- 2.5 RPL does not lead to credits being awarded against modules or courses that an applicant is exempted from. The student will complete the qualification in question with a total number of credits that are less than the normally required number of credits of the qualification. The academic record will reflect “exempted” against modules/courses that he or she was exempted from, but the certificates awarded will not reflect any RPL acknowledgement.
- 2.6 Short courses offered outside the HEQSF are non-credit bearing but learning acquired counts for RPL.
- 2.7 Not only RPL, but WIL should also form part of the institutional assessment.

### 3. ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 RPL is more than assessment – it is merely a process that includes “translation” of informal and non-formal bodies of language of knowledge into their formal and structured equivalents.
- 3.2 RPL require consideration of differentiation between experiential and academic knowledge as well as the areas and levels to which the RPL applies.
- 3.3 The foundation of an RPL portfolio is the evidence of the learning a learner claims to have acquired.

Evidence is the material a learner submits to prove their claim of NQF-level learning and can be in any form of documentation or material, such as written, audio, video, samples, designs, photos, etc.

In the case of written documents, the following is deemed acceptable:

- reports,

- personal appraisals,
- certificates,
- transcripts,
- manuals or articles written by the learner,
- letters of recommendation,
- job descriptions,
- case studies,
- documents compiled by the learner, etc.

### 3.4 Challenge exams

The challenge exam process can be described as an alternative strategy of assessment, as an alternative to compiling an RPL portfolio.

The methods chosen will depend on the learning outcomes and the assessment criteria, the purpose of the assessment, and the level of learning that is expected.

Challenge exams can include a variety of written and non-written assessment methods, for the purpose of awarding credit without requiring the compilation of an RPL portfolio.

Challenge exam methods can include the following

- a written paper,
- oral examination,
- demonstration, simulation,
- role-play,
- assignments,
- projects, etc

A challenge examination is appropriate where skills assessment is involved, e.g. in computer science or other practical learning programmes.

It is also appropriate where calculations and modelling are involved, i.e. in mathematics and statistics and obvious for those subjects that are not easily applied in practice, except for specialists. These subjects would be like economics.

Besides an examination that stands on its own, there is sometimes a need to assess a certain aspect with a challenge method like an assignment. This challenge assignment can then be part of a portfolio.

### 3.5 General sources of error in RPL assessment

Since the assessment of an RPL Portfolio is done according to the principles of a qualitative assessment, the assessor needs to be cognisant of the following specific errors, which can occur.

- **Leniency or Harshness Error**
  - Some assessors tend to make judgments which are, on average, much more favourable or more lenient than judgments made by other assessors.
  - Conversely, other assessors may make judgments, which are consistently more unfavourable than the judgments of other assessors.
  - These errors are sometimes referred to as *leniency* and *harshness* effects and are analogous to the phenomenon, which learners in traditional settings encounter, in *easy* or *hard* graders.
- **Errors of Central Tendency**
  - Many assessors are reluctant to commit themselves one way or the other and as a consequence tend to make most ratings near the average or centre of the scale.
  - This type of error is referred to as the error of *central tendency*.
- **Halo Effect**

- In situations where a learner is being assessed in several different specific areas, a favourable overall impression may result in unjustifiably favourable judgments in all areas.
  - This type of error is often referred to as the *halo effect* although the reverse can also occur.
  - That is, an unfavourable overall impression can result in unjustifiably unfavourable judgments in specific areas.
  - This is a particular problem where more than one module in the same subject field is assessed and where a candidate has above average knowledge in one module but insufficient knowledge in another module.
- **Initial Impressions**
    - An error similar to the halo effect can result from the initial impression an assessor has of a candidate.
    - It can happen that a favourable or unfavourable initial impression will unjustifiably affect later judgments of specific areas of performance.
- **Stereotypes**
    - Strongly held attitudes or beliefs can cause misperception and error in judgement. An example is an *assessor who believes that experiential learning cannot lead to foundational knowledge acquisition on tertiary level.*
    - In such a case a stereotype of non-traditional learners influences judgement.
    - The same can happen where an assessor believes that authenticity cannot be proved when using RPL portfolios.
- **Similarity of Background**

The degree of similarity between an assessor and the person being assessed with respect to background, attitudes and ethnic group has been shown to affect judgments with greater *similarity* tending to produce more favourable judgments.

#### 4. APPLICATION

- 4.1 RPL application can be made by completing the relevant application forms indicating RPL is required for entry requirements and/or exemption from modules and/or courses that contribute to a specific qualification.
- 4.2 In this regard the administrative and support services for both prior and subsequent to the RPL process as set out in 5, must be in place.
- 4.3 In case of RPL, applicants will be admitted on the institutions discretion according to the RPL committee's recommendation.
- 4.4 The RPL committee consists of the Registrar, the relevant programme coordinator as RPL management committee and the relevant academic staff appointed by the RPL management committee to best evaluate and/or assess the RPL application.
- 4.5 Members engaged in the RPL process should be thoroughly informed about the process.
- 4.6 Certificates awarded signifying successful completion of a qualification will *not reflect* acknowledgement of RPL but academic records will reflect RPL as "exempted".
- 4.7 The RPL process of the institution must be transparent.

#### 5. PROCESS

The RPL procedures are as follows:

- 5.1 If a student is of opinion that the skills and/or previous informal learning acquired are sufficient for entering a programme or relevant to the outcomes, aim and structure of a specific programme offered by the APA, he/she may apply for RPL.
- 5.2 The applicant is to gather all relevant information and compare it to the learning outcomes of the specific program offered by the APA.

- 5.3 Any student who complies to, or is thought to comply with possible RPL, is to submit an application form and a written evaluation request as well as a portfolio of the evidence to the Registrar of the APA. The RPL portfolio a learner submits, will serve as proof of the applicant's expertise and the associated value of the experience on an academic level.
- 5.4 Each portfolio is to be compiled in the format of a notebook, where a division is provided for each individual module/learning programmes a learner applies for.
- 5.5 The relevant information about the possible RPL should be noted on this request as well as the nature, site and year/s in which the skills or learning were acquired.
- 5.6 The registrar is to acknowledge receipt of the application within 14 days and inform the candidate about the date on which the application will be assessed.
- 5.7 A board of evaluators which forms the RPL committee (consisting of the registrar, programme coordinator as RPL management committee and the lecturer(s) of the specific subject for which RPL is applied for,) has the responsibility to visually examine all supporting documents and/or materials provided by the applicant. The RPL Advisor is the specialist (in an academic institution an academic) who is responsible for facilitating candidates through the RPL process.
- 5.8 The RPL Assessor is the specialist who is responsible for assessing candidate learning. The Institute will appoint an assessor who will be a subject specialist and who has been trained in the principles and practices of RPL.
- 5.9 The board must evaluate the applicant on all relevant matters concerning the aim, structure, guidelines and quality of the programme or subject.
- 5.10 After assessment, the board of evaluators will make a decision as to whether RPL should be considered.
- 5.11 The decision is communicated to the board of the faculty and the Senate, and the Senate will make a decision on the approval of the RPL.
- 5.12 The candidate should be notified within 14 days after the meeting of the board of evaluators about the decision regarding RPL, and the applicant will be issued a statement of credits recognized.
- 5.13 A written rationale should be provided to the applicant if not granted.
- 5.14 If granted, the Head of the institution or the registrar will meet the student in person.
- 5.15 All documentation regarding RPL must be filed in the applicant's file.
- 5.16 Records of students admitted by RPL must be kept to comply with the rules of the HEQCIS.

## **B. CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER (CAT)**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) ensures that students are able to receive recognition for formal learning achievements. The process of CAT ensures mobility of an individual student between programmes and institutions.

The recognition of credits for the purpose of transfer from one qualification to another refers to the vertical, horizontal and/or diagonal transfer of credits towards a qualification.

Standards of qualifications must be maintained

## 2. PRINCIPLES

2.1 The CAT process must be open and transparent

**2.2 A maximum of 50 % of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification.**

2.3 Credits obtained from studies that do not lead to a qualification should not count for CAT.

2.4 Credits are used as a measure of volume of learning required for a qualification and credit accumulation is the totalling of credits towards the completion of the qualification.

2.5 The credit rating system estimates that 10 notional hours of study are equivalent to one credit.

2.6 The recognition of credits for the purpose of transfer from one qualification to another is determined by the nature of the qualifications, the relationship between them and the extent of the curricula of specific subjects.

2.7 Credits for an incomplete qualification may lead to recognition for CAT at the same or different institution.

2.8 Credits obtained for studies that do not lead to a qualification could count for CAT towards relevant qualifications at the same or different institution. Credits for an incomplete qualification at one institution may lead to CAT for the same qualification at another institution.

## 3. ASSESSMENT

3.1 The assessment of CAT should be a comprehensive and inclusive assessment process.

3.2 The student should submit as much information for the CAT process as possible. This must include but are not limited to

- Result sheets
- Study guides with content and SAQA exit levels
- Assignments
- Any other information that can provide information that provide proof of credits obtained.

## 4. CAT PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

### • Completion of an application form

Students who want to apply for CAT must complete an institutional application form indicating whether the application for CAT. A board of evaluators (consisting of the registrar, programme coordinator and the lecturer of the specific subject for which CAT is applied for) has the responsibility to visually examine all supporting documents and/or materials provided by the applicant. The CAT Advisor is the specialist (in an academic institution an academic) who is responsible for facilitating candidates through the CAT process.

### • Submitting of evidence of formal learning

Credits are transferred within or between institutions for similar courses/modules between qualifications based on a comparison of the qualifications undertaken at another institution. Courses taken previously at another institution will be evaluated on course equivalency to determine relevance and fulfilment of the curriculum objectives/outcomes of the particular course/module.

The credit is guaranteed by our institution on commencement of a qualification based on previous study and specific articulation.

Credits obtained from studies that do not lead to qualification (for example, non-degree studies) should count for credit accumulation and transfer mechanism towards relevant qualifications in the same or different institutions.

Credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification, or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification.

- **The nature of the qualification**

The recognition of credits for the purposes of transfer from one qualification to another is determined by the nature of the qualifications, the relationship between them, the nature, complexity, and extent of the curricula associated with the specific subjects to be recognised for exemption and/or inclusion, and the nature of the assessment used.

- **Maximum credit transfer**

A maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification, provided that no more than 50% of the credits required for the other qualification are credits that have been used for a completed qualification. This principle seeks to protect the integrity of qualifications, by ensuring that the exception does not become the norm.

- **Reflection**

CAT will be reflected on academic records but not certificates awarded signifying successful completion of a qualification with acknowledgement of CAT.

### **C. APPEAL**

An open and transparent appeal process is in place and institutions need to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to provide administrative support. Applicants not satisfied with the decision of the RPL/CAT committee, have the right to appeal to the head of the institution who has the authority to ask for a review of the whole process and can refer the matter to the Faculty Board. The decision of the head of the institution or the Faculty Board is final.

Composed by SDN

Revised and approved by Senate on 16 Nov 16 and by the Board 8 March 2017.

