



South African Nursing Council

(Under the provisions of the Nursing Act, 2005)

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REVISED POLICY GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING BY NURSING EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (NEI's)

1. PURPOSE

To update NEI's with the latest trends in the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning for legacy and new nursing qualifications.

2. DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of these Revised Guidelines—

“Assessment” means a process of gathering and weighing evidence in order to determine whether learners have demonstrated outcomes specified in unit standards and/or qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The generic assessment unit standard regarding the planning performance of assessment of learning outcomes outlines the assessment process in detail. Providers are responsible for the management of assessment;

“Constituent” means a person belonging to a defined or delegated constituency, or an organisation or body referred to in SAQA's and the Education and Training Quality Assurance Body's (ETQA) Regulations. ETQA's have constituent learners, constituent assessors and constituent moderators;

“Credit” means the value assigned by the SAQA and the ETQA to 10 notional hours of learning;

“Credit accumulation” means the total number of credits required to complete a qualification or a part-qualification;

“Credit transfer” means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions;

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

“Education and Training Quality Assurance Body (ETQA)” means a body in terms of Section 5(1)(a)(ii) of the SAQA Act, 1995, which is responsible for the monitoring and auditing of achievements in terms of national standards or qualifications, and to which specific functions relating to the monitoring and auditing of national standards and/or qualifications have been assigned in terms of Section 5 (1)(b)(i) of the stated act;

“Evidence Facilitation” means a process by which candidates are assisted to produce and organise evidence for the purpose of assessment, which is not an essential part of every assessment process, but is however useful in many contexts, including recognition of prior learning (RPL). The generic assessment standard regarding the facilitation of the preparation and presentation of assessment evidence by candidates details this process;

“Exit Level Outcome” is a description of demonstrable and assessable end products of a learning process;

“Formal learning” means learning that occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment and that is explicitly designated as such, which leads to the awarding of a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF;

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

“Learning Outcome” means the applied competence or statement of what the learner knows, is able to do and other attributes and values;

“Learning Programme” means a combination of courses, modules or learning units through which learners can achieve the learning outcomes of a qualification;

“Lifelong learning” means learning that takes place in all contexts in life from a life-wide, life-deep and lifelong perspective, which includes learning behaviours and obtaining knowledge; understanding; attitudes; values and competences for personal growth; social and economical well-being, democratic citizenship, cultural identity; and employability

“Moderation” means ensuring that assessments were conducted in accordance with agreed practices that are fair, reliable and valid. The assessors are to ensure consistency. The provider is responsible for the management of moderation. A generic standard regarding the moderation of assessment details this process. One (1) moderator usually checks the work of several;

“National Qualifications Framework (NQF)” means a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, co-ordination, registration and publication of articulated and quality-assured national qualifications and part-qualifications. The South African NQF is a single integrated system, comprising three co-ordinated qualification sub-frameworks for: General and Further Education and Training; Higher Education; and Trades and Occupations;

“Non-formal learning” means learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning towards a qualification or part-qualification; it is often associated with learning that results in improved workplace practice but does not necessarily lead to the awarding of credits;

“NQF Act” means the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, 2008 (Act No. 67 of 2008);

“Nursing Education Institution (NEI)” means any institution that is accredited by the SANC in terms of the Nursing Act, 2005 (Act No. 33 of 2005);

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

“Portfolio of Evidence” means a collection of evidence, usually in a file format, which the applicant submits at the assessment interview in order to demonstrate levels of competency and learning outcomes achieved;

“Professional body” means anybody of expert practitioners in an occupational field, which includes an occupational body;

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

“Programme” means a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences, which leads to the achievement of agreed exit level outcomes and a qualification;

“Provider” means an entity that offers any education programme or trade and occupational learning programme that leads to a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF;

“Qualification” means a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning and which has been assessed in terms of exit level outcomes, registered on the NQF and certified and awarded by a recognised body;

“Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)” means the principles and processes through which prior knowledge and/or skills of a person are made visible and are assessed for the purposes of certification, alternative access and admission, and further learning and development. As a principle, it endorses the value of giving recognition to knowledge and skills that have been acquired outside a formal learning programme. As a process, it consists of a range of educational and training activities and services through which the principle of RPL is applied and learners are supported in different contexts as they go through the RPL process. These activities and services include the provision of RPL-related information; advising; coaching; and administration services; alternative access programmes; integrated curriculum design; and a variety of formative and summative assessment practices;

“Registered Constituent Assessor and Moderator” means a person registered by the relevant ETQA in accordance with criteria established by SAQA, who measures the achievement of specified NQF unit standards or qualifications. All ETQA’s must have a register of assessors and moderators. A similar register for verifiers is optional; and

“RPL Advice and Support Services” means an additional service required in terms of effective RPL, which focuses on assisting learners to make effective choices about available programmes, as well as career and work-related opportunities.

3. INTRODUCTION

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), Act, (Act 67 of 2008), mandates the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to develop, after consultation with quality councils, a national policy for assessment, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT). The revised RPL Policy builds on the long development trajectory and is grounded in extensive stakeholder consultation. SAQA initially developed a Policy for RPL in 2002 and Criteria and Guidelines for RPL in 2003. Both of these documents have been used widely and remain in use but now need to be updated to align the policies with the NQF Act, (Act 67 of 2008), which replaced the SAQA Act, (Act 58 of 1995).

4. BACKGROUND

The NQF Act (Act 67 of 2008), and acts associated with three Quality Councils ushered in a NQF strengthened by lessons learned from the first 15 years of implementation. The original objectives of integration, access and redress, mobility and progression and quality remain and RPL is key for the achievement of these objectives and for the realisation of the fullest developmental potential of lifelong learning.

RPL involves various forms of recognition of non-formal and informal learning that learners of all ages may have acquired in the course of their working lives or in participation in society and community activities outside formal places of learning. RPL has differing purposes, a few of which are highlighted below:

5. RPL FOR ACCESS

One situation in which RPL is needed is when learners seek access to a college/ university when they do not meet all the formal entrance criteria set by the institution of learning they wish to enter. In many cases, prospective learners may go through a process of mediation and preparation (sometimes referred to as “portfolio development”) towards assessment of their readiness to enter these courses of study.

RPL Guidelines for Access

Providers will be required to:

- o advise learners on and provide support to learners of the value of prior learning and of the steps in the process involved for making an application;
- o provide appropriate information to learners on the entry criteria/ requirements to successfully participate in the programme. RPL information leaflets and RPL application procedures should be made available to learners;
- o specify the entry criteria which form the basis for successful participation for each programme to be validated by the SANC;
- o include RPL information in all programme material;
- o establish an application procedure to assist learners to apply on the basis of prior learning experiences and to attach supporting evidence of prior learning experiences;
- o include the minimum acceptable criteria for the evaluation of the learner for successful participation, such as a minimum of five (5) years’ relevant life experience; a clear demonstration of the capacity to succeed; standard of overall application; individual commitment of the learner; and other specific requirements which may be specific to the programme;
- o carry out the assessment of the prior learning in the application by persons with appropriate expertise in the relevant field. If required, the provider may seek more information and evidence from the prospective learner;
- o ensure that their arrangements for selecting and assessing learners for entry are transparent and fair;

- o on completion of the assessment of the application, make a recommendation regarding entry into the programme;
- o have an appeals mechanism in place for all prospective applicants in the event of a learner making an appeal; and
- o monitor and record the application and its outcome to meet requirements of quality assurance elements for recognition of prior learning for entry.

6. RPL FOR CREDITS

Workers, including community workers and those currently unemployed, could for instance have acquired skills in the workplace or are self-taught and may have little or no formal qualifications and thus could consequently be barred from certain career paths. Some of these individuals may go through the RPL process for the purpose of “just knowing what they are worth”. In some cases, it is possible for individuals to undergo a process of preparation for testing and then assessment, at the end of which their experience is recognition with an appropriate certificate or credit.

RPL GUIDELINES FOR CREDIT

To facilitate the granting for credits, the provider will be required to:

- o outline criteria for credit arrangements on the basis of prior learning for each programme submitted to the SANC for validation. The provider should identify the criteria for the granting of credits to a learner during consultation for and development of the programme;
- o make this information available prior to the selection of learners and to prospective learners in all programme literature;
- o grant credits on the basis of prior learning experiences, which in the opinion of the provider meet a number of learning outcomes as part of a programme or programme requirement;
- o present evidence to demonstrate how the learner meets the relevant programme requirements in the case of uncertified learning experiences, which must demonstrate clearly how, when and where the learner met the criteria; and

- o advise learners to undertake the assessment if the evidence does not meet the assessment criteria.

7. RPL FOR ADVANCEMENT

This applies to people already doing certain jobs and holding positions for which they have qualifications other than those currently recognised for that position. To comply with new national and internationally comparable laws and criteria, these individuals may be legally required to acquire new certification in order to continue practice. There may be RPL preparation and assessment processes towards this certification.

RPL GUIDELINES FOR ADVANCEMENT (AWARD)

Recognition of prior learning for advancement is significantly more complex than recognition within a programme for entry or exemption in that a learner is facilitated to attain a complete advancement. This involves a rigorous process of analysis and evidence gathering in order to ensure that the standards for the advancement have been attained, which involves the following:

- **Identifying the award.** The award and award standards must be available to the learner and the provider.
- **Determining eligibility.** The eligibility of the learner is critical and the breadth and depth of the prior learning experiences of the learner must be evaluated. The following are criteria for determining eligibility for a learner seeking advancement:
 - o For a **major award** it is recommended that the learner should have a minimum of 6 – 8 years direct work experience.
 - o For a **minor award, special purpose and supplemental award**, the learner should have more than 2–3 years directly relevant prior learning experiences.
- **Analysis of knowledge, skill and competence.** It involves a review of knowledge, skill and competence for the award of the learner and matching this prior learning

against the learning outcomes for the award. This process is to be undertaken by the learner with the support of a mentor as appropriate, which involves:

- o listing the learning outcomes for a specific award;
 - o considering in terms of “can do/cannot do/have experience of/know and have applied” for each learning outcome;
 - o precisely identifying, for each learning outcome, how where and when learning took place; and
 - o ensuring, as a general rule, that the prior learning experience of the learner has achieved the majority of learning outcomes, i.e. more than 70%. If not, it is likely that the learner does not have sufficient experience to prove competency.
- **Gathering evidence.** The evidence can be collected in a portfolio of evidence/collection of evidence. The same piece of evidence may be presented for more than one outcome if appropriate to those outcomes as a group relating to a particular field of learning.
 - **Assessment of evidence.**
 - Assessors will be required to:
 - o assess, i.e. judge, the learner’s evidence against national standards as outlined in the awards standards ensuring authenticity, currency, reliability and sufficiency and ensuring evidence meets the required level of the national framework of the qualification;
 - o ensure that the evidence presented has met the knowledge, skill and competence elements of the award;
 - o ensure that the evidence has met more than 70% of all of the declared learning outcomes;
 - o judge and allocate a score to the evidence as presented in terms of achieving the standard on a scale of 0 – 100% achievement;
 - o arrange external authentication of the achievement of the standard by a “person competent” to ensure the achieved standard; and
 - o process the result through results approval.
 - **Making a recommendation.** Once the assessment is complete, a recommendation is made by the assessor regarding the attainment of the award. The grading of the

award will be made in accordance with the assessment criteria for the award in question.

RPL is not simply an assessment process – it involves mediation to ensure that candidates are able to make the transition from using knowledge and skills in one type of context to using the same knowledge and skills in a different context. Mediation is also needed when knowledge and skills are recognised for particular qualifications, part qualifications or other specific types of credit. Effective RPL processes – whether for access, credit or for recognition in the workplace for white or blue collar workers – usually involve making sure that RPL candidates have access to the mediation tools required for successful transition.

This revised RPL Policy draws on research and practice to date in order to focus on the further development and resourcing of RPL; greater inclusivity regarding RPL; and the enhancement of the quality of RPL nationally.

8. RPL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NQF IN SOUTH AFRICA

The NQF in South Africa is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, co-ordination, registration and publication of articulated and quality assured national qualifications and part qualifications.

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

- The focus is on what has been learned and not on the status of the institution, organisation or place where learning was obtained.
- Credit is awarded for knowledge and skills acquired through experience and not for experience gained.
- Learning is made explicit through assessment and/or other methods that engage the intrinsic development of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired.
- Candidate guidance and support, the preparation of evidence and the development of an appropriate combination of teaching-learning, mentoring and assessment approaches are core to RPL practice.
- Notwithstanding all features listed here, RPL is generally considered to be a developmental process and not an end in itself.

9. RELEVANCE OF RPL IN NURSING EDUCATION

Nursing education plays a significant role in RPL. Historically, nursing has been one of the few professions that provided access to education to many marginalised groups, which had no previous access to formal education and training and, amongst others, included:

- o women without the economic means to access further and higher education; and
- o people living in remote and rural areas who did not meet the high academic entry requirements set by many tertiary institutions.

In addition, the structure of the profession consists of three different categories that denote a system of career progression. As a result, NEI's can utilise the RPL system to further maximise these benefits by:

- o providing access opportunities to the nursing profession;
- o providing progression opportunities to those within the nursing profession;
- o formally recognising the expertise and skills nurses have acquired from their experiences within the healthcare system; and
- o developing competencies by facilitating access to specialised nursing education and training programmes.

The South African Nursing Council (SANC) views RPL as an assessment process to assess an individual's level of competence in the field of nursing, which is gained through participation in the formal, informal or non-formal context, or through work experience, formal or informal study and other life experiences. The purpose of such an assessment process is to recognise the prior learning of an individual with the aim of attaining credits towards NQF registered qualifications offered by an NEI. RPL within this context contributes to and promotes both the transformational intention of the NQF and the objectives of the Skills Development Act, (Act No. 97 of 1998).

10. POLICY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF RPL

10.1 Policy statement on RPL

The SANC commits itself to ensure that all its accredited providers of nursing education implement RPL and that applicants gain access to nursing education through a credible RPL system.

10.2 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to:

- o provide guidance to the providers of nursing education and training with implementation of RPL;
- o outline the RPL access requirements for nursing qualifications;
- o clarify the role of providers of nursing education and training with regard to RPL; and
- o inform the providers of the role of the SANC with regard to RPL.

10.3 Legislative framework

These guidelines are informed by a number of Acts, Regulations and Policy Frameworks, ranging from nursing and health education to labour. The underpinning legislation is the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. A range of policy imperatives compels the higher education community to respond to the dual demands of reconstruction and development, as well as the consolidation and expansion of South Africa's capacity to participate in a global economy that improves the quality of life of all its citizens.

10.4 Principles of RPL assessment

Generic assessment principles also apply to an RPL assessment system and as such, providers of nursing education should integrate these principles into an RPL assessment system. These principles are:

- o fairness;
- o validity (appropriateness);
- o flexibility;
- o reliability; and
- o cost-effectiveness/practicality.

10.5 The RPL process

A successful RPL system requires comprehensive planning prior to implementation. Whilst these are generic core features and phases inherent to an RPL process, each provider has to consider its unique situation, available resources, committees and the kind of potential applicants anticipated. By doing this, an education and training provider will be able to accurately determine the number of steps through which a typical applicant must go. Providers have to take cognisance of the fact that RPL is meant to be an assessment alternative that counteracts the gate-keeping barriers to access learning. It must therefore be simple, yet credible and rigorous process. A typical RPL process consists of:

- o a pre-entry/pre-application phase;
- o an advisory phase;
- o a facilitation phase;
- o an assessment phase;
- o a moderation phase; and
- o a feedback phase.

10.6 The SANC'S role with regard to RPL

The SANC, as the professional regulatory body of nursing in South Africa, has to ensure that persons admitted to the nursing profession are skilled and knowledgeable practitioners, who are competent to provide quality and safe nursing education and training, and as such SANC must ensure that its accredited providers implement credible RPL systems that do not compromise the integrity of nursing education and training.

The role of SANC is to:

- o assist its constituent providers to implement quality-assured RPL;
- o provide a strategic framework for implementation, which includes an audit of current practice;
- o develop detailed sector-specific plans;
- o build capacity of resources and staff;

- o register constituent assessors and moderators;
- o facilitate the credible moderation of assessment;
- o evaluate the assessment practices of constituent providers to ensure that the core criteria in terms of quality assurance regarding RPL assessments are met by providers;
- o moderate appropriate assessment instruments and tools, quality management systems and procedures;
- o establish a research base.

10.7 Role of NEI's with regard to RPL

NEI's must have the following in place in respect of RPL:

- An institutional RPL Policy, which should express commitment to the RPL and NQF principles of access, redress and equity, which must be aligned with applicable legislation.
- Personnel to conduct RPL assessments.
- Methods, tools and processes for RPL assessment.
- RPL information and a conducive environment with adequate resources.
- Explicit details about its admission processes, procedures, assessment systems, fees and appeals system.

10.8 Personnel to conduct RPL assessments

The roles, responsibilities and functions of personnel involved with the implementation of RPL must be explicitly stated, e.g. advisors, facilitators (if different from advisors) and moderators. Providers have to ensure that their assessors and moderators are duly educated and trained with regard to the relevant qualifications and that they are registered with the SANC. Other personnel in the institution must be oriented about the RPL process.

10.9 Methods, tools and processes for RPL assessment

The RPL assessment methods, tools and processes should mainly address:

- o the process of the assessment and expectations from learners; and
- o compliance with assessment principles, which is critical.

10.10 Information on RPL

The providers must duly inform potential applicants via brochures, on websites, etc.

There must be a conducive environment with adequate supportive resources for RPL. The environment in which RPL assessment is conducted must be equipped with the required supportive resources.

10.11 Implementation of RPL for basic nursing education programmes

The reason for an applicant applying for RPL assessment will either be for:

- o access (ease of entry); or
- o advance standing.

In terms of the acquisition of credits, several fundamental considerations have to be emphasised to ensure the success of RPL, namely:

- o RPL assessment can either be conducted against a whole qualification or part thereof. In the nursing profession, the latter is a more realistic option. This will also be influenced by the inherent rules and policies of NEIs;
- o the assessment of achievement of learning outcomes, which should be conducted by registered assessors and moderated by certified/registered moderators;
- o the assessment being done against approved outcomes, i.e. registered unit standards/programme or level outcomes. The assessment should balance theory and practical requirements of the desired outcomes;

- o credits being awarded must be related to learning period through an experience and not for the experience itself or the duration thereof, since not all experience yields meaningful learning; and
- o individualised assessment, as no experience will yield the same learning for different people, which is one of the serious challenges in the assessment of RPL.

10.12 SANC registration requirements for RPL assessment learners

A person who wishes to have his/her learning assessed against particular outcomes pertaining to a nursing qualification for the purposes of RPL may lodge an application with an NEI that is accredited by the SANC to provide such qualification. Once the RPL assessment process is completed, the principal or person in charge of the accredited provider must follow the process outlines below on behalf of the applicant:

- The submission of the application, accompanied by the required documentation, to the SANC. All requirements, as stipulated in the regulations regarding registers for learners and rolls for pupils (GG Nos. R.3735 and R.3736), respectively, which include all other information and documentation that may be required for routine registration as a learner, must accompany this application.
- An indication that the applicant successfully underwent an RPL assessment for statistical purposes.
- A declaration, signed by the head of the NEI, which states that the RPL Policy of the institution or the Department or Province was followed. This declaration needs to be endorsed by both the assessor and moderator (a copy of the Policy may be requested by the SANC). This must be done on the letterhead of the NEI.
- The names and SANC reference numbers of the registered assessors and certified moderators who conducted RPL assessment. These must be accompanied by certified copies of the certificates of the assessor(s) and moderator (s).

- The application must include a summary report (approximately two pages) regarding the outcome of the RPL assessment, which includes:
 - the learning outcomes against which the learner was assessed and found competent;
 - assessment methods that were used (integrated assessment);
 - the evidence that was produced for assessment (a portfolio of evidence is essential, but should not be sent to the SANC); and
 - assessment outcome of both the theory and practical components.

10.13 Record keeping

Complete documentation and records of RPL assessment must be kept by the NEI and must be made available to the SANC upon request.

NB: Access into basic and post nursing programmes