

**MINISTERIAL TASK TEAM ON A NATIONAL  
STRATEGY FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR  
LEARNING (RPL)**

**Final report incorporating a proposal for the  
national implementation strategy**

**January 2013**

# Contents

Acronyms .....	i
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Context and background: Broad overview .....	1
1.1.1 Pre-1994 RPL policy and research.....	1
1.1.2 Post-1994 policy and implementation developments.....	2
1.1.3 Developments from 2007 .....	3
1.2 Terms of reference and composition of the task team .....	6
1.3 Approach of the task team .....	7
1.3.1 Submission and engagements .....	8
1.3.2 Parameters of the literature, existing research, and document and policy review .....	9
1.3.3 Primary research undertaken for the RPL MTT process .....	9
1.4 Vision for RPL implementation .....	10
1.5 Terminology and definitions .....	11
1.6 Outline of the report.....	13
Chapter 2: Literature review: RPL models, practices and research.....	14
2.1 Review of international ‘good’ practice in terms of country practices overview.....	14
2.1.1 Status of RPL in national education and training systems, legislative and policy frameworks, overall approaches and key drivers.....	14
2.1.2 Status of the RPL centres, roles in mainstreaming RPL, approaches to resources and funding .....	15
2.1.3 Scope, scale and type of RPL in different sectors (including practitioner identity and development).....	16
2.2 Review of RPL research and practice in South Africa .....	18
2.2.1 Early RPL pilot projects: 1997–2003 .....	18
2.2.2 Very little RPL in further education and training .....	20
2.2.3 Higher education RPL literature.....	21
2.2.4 RPL in trades, occupational sectors and workplaces .....	25
2.2.5 The SAQA UWC RPL research project .....	26
2.2.6 Low take-up, so far.....	26
2.3 Key themes and implications emerging from the literature, research, document and policy process review .....	27

2.3.1	Approaches to RPL: Integrated versus differentiated.....	27
2.3.2	RPL centres and delivery .....	28
2.3.3	Guidance and counselling .....	29
2.3.4	Quality assurance.....	29
2.3.5	Scope and form of RPL.....	29
2.3.6	Other points to consider .....	30
2.3.7	Recommendations for the South African context .....	31
Chapter 3: Consultations with key national stakeholders, and commissioned research into SETA RPL practices.....		32
3.1	Consultations with key national stakeholders .....	32
3.2	Research into RPL practices in SETAs.....	36
3.2.1	RPL policy and its implementation.....	36
3.2.1.1	RPL policy .....	36
3.2.1.2	Status of RPL implementation.....	37
3.2.1.3	Number of qualifications and unit standards awarded through RPL.....	37
3.2.1.4	Financial support to RPL processes.....	38
3.2.1.5	Systemic problems and obstacles in RPL implementation .....	39
3.2.2	Recommendations by SETA ETQAs for future RPL implementation.....	41
3.2.2.1	Recommendations for the immediate future.....	41
3.2.2.2	Recommendations for the medium term .....	41
3.2.2.3	Recommendations for the long term.....	42
3.3	Key issues .....	42
Chapter 4: Resourcing and funding RPL.....		44
4.1	Funding approaches to RPL in South Africa .....	45
4.2	Partnerships .....	47
4.3	Assessment centres .....	49
4.4	Review of RPL funding .....	50
4.5	Proposed funding models for South Africa.....	54
4.5.1	Funding options for South Africa .....	55
4.5.1.1	Model 1 – Wholly state-funded .....	55
4.5.1.2	Model 2 – State and employer funding .....	55
4.5.1.3	Model 3 – State and employer funding with student fees .....	56
4.5.2	Role of donors.....	56
Chapter 5: International and local legislative and policy review .....		57

5.1	International case study of RPL legislation: France .....	57
5.1.1	Introduction .....	57
5.1.2	The French legislative system .....	58
5.1.3	The laws are preceded by collaborative preparatory work .....	58
5.1.4	Number of participants .....	59
5.1.5	Funding and costs .....	60
5.1.6	Options for South Africa .....	61
5.2	Review of South African policy and legislation that currently impact on RPL implementation... .....	62
5.2.1	Introduction .....	62
5.2.2	Review of relevant legislation .....	63
5.2.2.1	The Constitution.....	63
5.2.2.2	A consideration of relevant white papers.....	63
5.2.2.3	The NQF Act .....	67
5.2.2.4	The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Act .....	68
5.2.2.5	The Skills Development Act.....	68
5.2.2.6	The Higher Education Act.....	69
5.2.2.7	Background to the 50% residency clause in higher education .....	70
5.2.3	Testing the 50% residency clause in higher education .....	72
5.3	Current South African policy, and related contextual shifts that may impact on RPL .....	74
5.3.1	The HRD Strategy, the National Planning Commission Report and the National Skills Development Strategy III, and the Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training .....	74
5.3.1.1	Overview .....	74
5.3.1.2	RPL-related public comments on the Green Paper.....	75
5.3.2	National artisan development: RPL model framework.....	77
5.3.3	SAQA .....	78
5.3.3.1	Policy development processes, including RPL .....	78
5.3.3.2	Career Advice Helpline.....	79
5.3.3.3	Advocacy for RPL.....	79
5.3.3.4	Coordination of projects .....	79
5.3.3.5	International liaison .....	80
5.3.4	Quality councils and the three qualification sub-frameworks.....	80
5.3.4.1	Umalusi .....	81
5.3.4.2	QCTO .....	81

5.3.4.3	Council on Higher Education (CHE) .....	82
5.3.4.4	Public comment issues on the three sub-frameworks .....	84
5.3.4.5	Subsequent Ministerial determination of sub-frameworks .....	86
5.3.5	Ministerial Task Teams.....	86
5.3.5.1	South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training.....	86
5.3.5.2	Community Education and Training Centres .....	87
5.3.5.3	SETA Performance.....	87
5.3.5.4	NCV Review .....	88
5.3.5.5	<i>Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences</i> .....	89
5.3.6	The DPSA's draft RPL policy .....	90
5.4	Key legislative and policy issues.....	91
5.4.1	The legal environment in international contexts.....	91
5.4.2	Legislative issues in South Africa .....	91
Chapter 6: Analysis, principles and recommendations.....		92
6.1	The legal environment .....	92
6.1.1	The law .....	92
6.1.2	Inter-ministerial collaboration .....	93
6.1.3	Creating an enabling environment for RPL.....	94
6.2	The role of history and culture in shaping RPL .....	94
6.3	RPL providers/centres.....	95
6.4	Purposes of RPL.....	96
6.5	Different approaches to RPL for different purposes.....	96
6.6	An RPL institute.....	97
6.7	Professionalisation of RPL.....	99
6.8	What the South African RPL system should aspire to.....	99
6.9	Costs and proposed funding models for RPL in South Africa .....	101
6.10	Further research on funding and costing.....	101
Chapter 7: National RPL Implementation strategy.....		102
7.1	Background .....	102
7.1.1	South Africa's socio-economic context and RPL.....	102
7.1.2	The development of RPL in South Africa .....	103
7.2	Vision for RPL implementation .....	104
7.3	Rationale (key issues and recommendations) .....	106
7.3.1	A national RPL institute.....	106

7.3.2	A state- and employer-driven funding and resourcing model.....	107
7.3.3	Implementation strategy driven by key and strategic projects .....	109
7.3.4	Implementation strategy underpinned by extensive advocacy and capacity development .....	110
7.3.5	Incremental quality development of the RPL system .....	111
7.4	Overall objective(s)/goal(s) .....	111
7.5	Cross-cutting and supporting activities and principles .....	112
7.5.1	Inter-ministerial/inter-departmental coordinating mechanism and support .....	112
7.5.2	Extensive buy-in of key role-players and stakeholders.....	112
7.5.3	Legislative and regulatory framework .....	112
7.6	Objectives, sub-objectives and activities: A high-level action plan .....	112
7.5	Roles and responsibilities.....	117
	DHET.....	117
	DPSA/Palama .....	117
	Other state departments .....	117
	SAQA, quality councils and SETAs.....	117
	Public and private education and training institutions i.e. providers.....	117
	Employers .....	118
	Trade unions .....	118
	References .....	119

## Acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AgriSETA	Agriculture Sector Education and Training Authority
ANC	African National Congress
APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
ATD-TTT	Artisan and Technician Development Technical Task Team
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CATHSSETA	Culture, Art, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport Education and Training Authority
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
CETA	Construction Sector Education and Training Authority
CETC	Community Education and Training Centre
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHIETA	Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
EU	European Union
EWSETA	Energy and Water SETA
FAIS	Financial Advisory and Intermediary Services
FASSET	Financial and Accounting Services SETA
FET	Further Education and Training
FSHEC	Free State Higher Education Consortium
FoodBevSETA	Food and Beverage Manufacturing SETA
GENFET	General and Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HRDC-SA	Human Resources Development Council South Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HW SETA	Health and Welfare SETA

INSETA	Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority
JET	Joint Education Trust
LGSETA	Local Government SETA
merSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
MICT	Media, Information and Communication Technologies SETA
MQA	Mining Qualifications Authority
MTT	Ministerial Task Team
NASCA	National Senior Certificate for Adults
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NLRD	National Learner Records Database
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
NTB	National Training Board
NTSI	National Training Strategy Initiative
NWU	North West University
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Palama	Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PSETA	Public Services SETA
QA	Quality Assurance
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAIVCET	South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASSETA	Safety and Security SETA
SDA	Skills Development Act
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
TETA	Transport SETA
UCT	University of Cape Town



UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UFS	University of the Free State
USA	United States of America
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VAE	Validation of Experiential Learning
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHEP	Workers Higher Education Project
W&R SETA	Wholesale and Retail SETA

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Context and background: Broad overview

Although the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is entrenched in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in order to contribute to both redress and increased articulation into, and mobility within, further education and training opportunities, it has not begun to fulfil its potential or early promise. The slogan that is most often associated with RPL from the early years is “from floor sweeper to engineer”. This was inspirational to some but to others showed a lack of understanding of the complexities associated with RPL, which we hope to point out in this report.

#### 1.1.1 Pre-1994 RPL policy and research

The first RPL-specific literature was produced by the progressive trade union movement as part of pre-election policy planning (ANC/COSATU 1993). Conspicuous by its absence in the National Education Policy Investigation, or NEPI (1993), research reports (in which the trade unions were also involved), RPL entered the South African lexicon in the context of early thinking about an NQF, drawing mainly from the Australian competency-based vocational education and training reforms. In South Africa RPL, along with the NQF as a whole, was viewed primarily as a redress mechanism, to “open doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked” (ANC 1995: 15). It is interesting that this goal has not yet been met. This is not to say that the practice of RPL (although not named as such) was new to South Africa; it already existed in access to trade tests and in ‘grandfather’ clauses for mature-age entry to higher education (see Mukora 2010, in Breier 2011: 203, for PhD research and articles on RPL-type ideas advanced within the De Lange Commission).

A small set of literature was developed through the National Training Board’s (NTB) National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) oriented to building a comprehensive NQF (NTB 1994). RPL was located within considerations of assessment practices more widely, definitions were offered, experiential learning theory and its relation to RPL was discussed, international drivers of RPL were outlined, and ways in which prior learning could be assessed were described in detail. This work “successfully lodged RPL (and the National Qualifications Framework) on the national policy agenda” (Pampallis forthcoming).

### 1.1.2 Post-1994 policy and implementation developments

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) published its RPL policy *The Recognition of Prior Learning in the Context of the South African National Qualifications Framework* in 2002 (SAQA 2002). The National Standards Bodies Regulations (No. 18787 of 28 March 1998 – RSA 1998, issued in terms of the SAQA Act, No. 58 of 1995) contain the definition of RPL that was used in the SAQA policy, which used a particular linking of access to redress; that is, “access” to education, training, and career opportunities in order to achieve “redress” in wider societal terms. The policy heeded some of the notes of caution that were beginning to surface at the time – for example, that RPL should: be “holistic” rather than narrow and technical; be contextual; take particular account of power and knowledge and “the ways in which some forms of knowledge are privileged” over others; pay attention to formative as well as summative assessment; and ensure the equal value of formal awards and awards acquired through RPL.

SAQA published its RPL policy implementation guidelines in 2004 (SAQA 2004). Aimed mainly at education and training institutions and related organisations, and taking account of interim policy developments such as the ‘nested’ approach to standards-generation and qualifications specification (in the “new academic policy” discussion document – CHE 2001), these guidelines took potential providers through the following chronological steps:

- Making a start: An audit of current practice.
- Planning: The development of sector-specific/context-specific plans.
- Getting ready: The capacity building of resources and staff.
- The tools: Design and moderation of assessment.
- Review and evaluation: Quality management processes.

However, the focus on formal education and training institutions at the expense of the workplace has been (and still is) the subject of some critique.

The period during and after the development and publication of the SAQA RPL policy and guidelines saw a variety of sub-sector policy development and pilot implementation projects. For example, most of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) developed their own policies, procedures and guidelines; the Committee of Technikon Principals developed a policy framework for the technikon sector (Du Pré and Pretorius 2001); the Department of Labour (2002) produced its own RPL “strategic framework for implementation”; the roll-out of the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) for under-qualified teachers was started in 2002; and the European Union (EU) funded a three-year RPL project in the construction sector from 2000 (see Blom et al. 2007: 80–82).

### 1.1.3 Developments from 2007

#### *System-level changes*

In 2008, the NQF review process culminated in the promulgation of the NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008). In addition, 2009 saw the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET),<sup>1</sup> with the DHET taking on:

- The following sectors of the former Department of Education: universities, further education and training (FET) colleges, and adult basic education and training (ABET); and
- The skills development functions from the Department of Labour, resulting in changes to the skills development framework and structures (e.g. the establishment of a third quality council: the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, or QCTO).

As a result of these structural and policy changes, RPL has been moved to a more central space in public policy dialogue and planning. For example, the DHET's *Revised Strategic Plan for 2010/11–2014/15* (2011c) indicates that

The strategic vision for RPL is that it will become a fully integrated, universally accepted mechanism, allied with education and training provision, to permit optimum utilisation of knowledge and skills acquired by South Africans outside the conventional channels of institutional and workplace learning. (DHET 2011c: 34–35)

#### *Participation in the OECD international study “Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning”*

At the same time as the macro-level changes described above, SAQA was working to reinvigorate RPL in South Africa, with some external impetus being provided by the 2006–08 Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) study, “Recognising Non-formal and Informal Learning” (Werquin 2010), in which South Africa was one of 22 participating countries (Gunning et al. 2008). The *Country Background Report* prepared by SAQA (Blom et al. 2007) presents an extensive contextual and systemic overview of RPL implementation in South Africa.

The *Country Note for South Africa* (Gunning et al. 2008)<sup>2</sup> notes that the take up of RPL has been lower than expected (Gunning et al.: 6), despite its being written into policy, legislation and frameworks. The report, drawing on Blom et al. (2007), provides a number of possible reasons for this (Gunning et al. 2008: 7–8):

- While Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) have policies and procedures in place, “there still seems to be a poor understanding of RPL as a discrete activity”;

---

<sup>1</sup> The Department of Education was restructured into two departments in 2009: the Department of Basic Education, which focuses on the schooling system and early childhood education; and the Department of Higher Education and Training.

<sup>2</sup> The *Country Note for South Africa* combines a synthesis analysis of the *Country Background Report* and interview data collected by the OECD team during a one-week visit to South Africa.

- Entry requirements to higher education still require the matriculation-level certificate, and the 50% “residency clause” is applied to RPL candidates; and
- Funding remains a problem.

Other issues relating to RPL implementation were also identified as part of the South African component of the OECD study (Gunning et al. 2008: 19):

- The emergence of the use of the portfolio as the predominant assessment tool. There is a need to diversify because of its high reliance on advanced literacy skills, and it does not ‘test’ a range of competencies; therefore it is not suitable in certain contexts and at certain literacy levels; and
- Diversity of practice and quality in relation to RPL in the NPDE.

By the end of 2007, SAQA had recorded 26,000 RPL achievements<sup>3</sup> on the National Learner Records Database (NLRD) (Gunning et al. 2008: 21). However, this was from only 4 ETQAs (and, of these, 90% of the RPL achievements came from 2 ETQAs). Lack of systems-level data was registered as a concern in the report, and it noted the issue of recording RPL credits on the ETQA databases for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) purposes as being distinct from certification issues (where the latter is used as a reason for not recording RPL achievement at all). The recommendation to SAQA was that this was an area in which it should “vigorously exercise” its mandate.

The *Country Note for South Africa* made the following recommendations (Gunning et al. 2008: 23):

- Provide financial support for new and fledgling institutional RPL services.
- Establish an RPL practitioners’ network.
- Develop the capacity of the FET sector, given its crucial location in skills development.
- Review, at a national level, systemic barriers to RPL and access/admissions policies (especially in relation to higher education).
- Address the current gap in RPL access/provision (from higher education/sectors where qualification upgrading is a requirement to using RPL for “recognition of knowledge, skills and competencies towards employment for those who are unemployed or in informal or casual labour”):
  - Some effort should be put into the development of applying a developmental approach to the large group of under-30s with low levels of formal education and high levels of unemployment (acknowledging that this group may have less developed sources of prior learning) – the aim would be to provide developmental RPL in conjunction with a learning programme, using the FET

---

<sup>3</sup> However, this figure is not broken down further in terms of unit standards or full or part qualifications etc, or by sector or by level.

sector as the educational base (and this may require the prioritisation of resources to this sector); and

- A similar approach could be used for people older than 30 and who may have a richer prior experience resource base.
- Ensure that high-level and coordinated advocacy and awareness-raising for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning takes place among national bodies, including the SETAs/ETQAs.<sup>4</sup> This collaborative effort should:
  - Address funding, as fees charged to RPL candidates will not be able to cover the necessary activities; and
  - Open discussion on the setting up of a national *centre* for RPL practitioners “to share best practice, offer support, commission research and establish links with RPL practitioners in other countries” (Gunning et al. 2008: 25).<sup>5</sup>
- The following recommendations were made in relation to SAQA’s oversight role:
  - SAQA needs to ensure that the bodies it regulates deliver on their RPL commitments and that they comply with regulatory requirements;
  - SAQA needs to review its data collection requirements in relation to RPL, and to ensure that ETQAs are reporting accordingly; and
  - SAQA needs “to be brave in the application of its regulatory powers” in cases where ETQAs are not complying (Gunning et al.: 25).

The last recommendation, above, with regard to SAQA’s oversight role, raises issues in relation to urgent research, such as: possible barriers to implementation; and development of RPL tools and techniques that would support potential groups to qualify as artisans.

In concluding the *Country Note for South Africa*, Gunning et al. (2008) state that

...the legislative and policy-based connection between recognition of non-formal and informal learning and redress remains strong, the strength of advocacy of recognition of non-formal and informal learning by government, other stakeholders and providers is variable, and the widespread availability of high-quality, accessible recognition services has not reached many for whom it was intended, particularly individuals who do have knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through years of work and other life experience. The review team found commendable practice in individual providers – “islands of good practice” – but was concerned to find that practitioners were isolated. (Gunning et al. 2008: 23)

---

<sup>4</sup> Where the report distinguishes between SETAs and ETQAs, it is a shorthand acknowledgement that not all ETQAs are located within SETAs. The RPL MTT also recognises that the NQF Act has ushered in changes relating to the status of the SETA-based ETQAs with the establishment of the QCTO, and the transition of non-SETA ETQAs to professional bodies.

<sup>5</sup> It seems that Gunning et al. (2008) use the notions of ‘RPL practitioner network’ and ‘national centre for RPL practitioners’ interchangeably.

### *Moving forward after the OECD study*

In 2010, SAQA began the conceptual and planning work “as part of a national strategy towards developing a fully-fledged RPL system in the country” (SAQA 2011a: 1) that culminated in the national RPL conference “Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice”, which took place on 23–25 February 2011. The conference was attended by nearly 400 delegates, and a range of presentations were made (nearly 50 abstracts were received in advance of the conference), showcasing mainly South African research and practice. (These presentations are considered in Chapter 2 of the current report, as part of the local literature review.)

The SAQA RPL conference culminated in a resolution and working document on RPL (SAQA 2011b), and included, inter alia, the following resolutions:

- That a national RPL strategy should be developed, and
- That a Ministerial Task Team for RPL was needed.

Following the 2011 RPL conference, SAQA established a reference group to undertake a review of the national RPL policy (that work is currently under way).

## **1.2 Terms of reference and composition of the task team**

The gazetting of the Ministerial Task Team on RPL (RPL MTT) on 27 January 2012 (Government Gazette No. 34963) should therefore be understood in terms of the background and events described in Section 1.1 above. The following are the terms of reference that guided the work of the RPL MTT:

- 1) The RPL Ministerial Task Team is required to:
  - 1.1. Develop a national strategy for the wide-scale implementation of RPL in the post-school sector;
  - 1.2. Advise on the personnel, training and quality requirements of a national RPL strategy, including the feasibility, structure and function of a national RPL institute;
  - 1.3. Advise on the legislative requirements for implementation of the national RPL strategy;
  - 1.4. Develop an action plan for the implementation of the national RPL strategy;
  - 1.5. Advise on the resource implications of the national RPL strategy;
  - 1.6. Devise a funding model to support the national RPL strategy that takes into account the interests of the skilled unemployed and out-of-school young people;
  - 1.7. Advise on the roles and responsibilities of all major relevant parties in the implementation of the national RPL strategy, including DHET and other state departments, education institutions both public and private, the National Skills Authority, SETAs, SAQA and the quality councils; and

1.8. Advise on any other matter that would advance the systematic application of RPL in the post-school education and training system.

- 2) In undertaking its work the Task Team must investigate relevant RPL good practice, consult or receive evidence from all relevant South African stakeholder bodies, and take full account of South African RPL research findings, including especially the proceedings and recommendations of SAQA's national RPL conference held in February 2011.

The task team was expected to submit its report by 31 August 2012, a deadline extended by three months (from 31 May 2012).

The following task team members were appointed by the Minister of Higher Education and Training and were responsible for the work leading to the final report and proposed National RPL Implementation Strategy:

- Ms Michelle Buchler (chairperson);
- Mr Gino Govender;
- Mr Eddie de Klerk;
- Dr Maboreng Maharaswa;
- Mr Max Makhubalo;
- Mr Willy Matthiae;
- Mr Joe Samuels; and
- Professor Shirley Walters.

The following member was part of the initial appointed task team, but was unable to participate due to other commitments:

- Ms Lulama Nare.

### **1.3 Approach of the task team**

The task team met several times to draft a substantiated knowledge- and research-based approach to the development of the national RPL strategy. Other activities that were undertaken to develop the final report and implementation strategy include the following.



### 1.3.1 Submission and engagements

The task team decided that, due to time and budgetary constraints, a *limited* consultation with key stakeholders and role-players would be undertaken at this stage, and that a more formal consultative process would be recommended to the Minister to be undertaken once the draft strategy had been developed and he had engaged with it.

The task team approached the following stakeholders/role-players for their views on a number of key issues in relation to RPL implementation blockages and recommendations for the development of an implementation strategy:

- Labour federations through SAQA's RPL reference group process;
- Labour education organisations;
- The National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC);
- The Human Resources Development Council South Africa (HRDC-SA);
- The quality councils;
- Higher Education South Africa (HESA);
- The South African College Principals Organisation (SACPO);
- Business organisations;
- Private providers; and
- SETAs (through the research process described in Chapter 3).

The task team received submissions from the following: two higher education role-players; a labour education organisation; an individual who works extensively in the FET college sector; and an individual who is a registered assessor.

The task team held meetings with the following people, in order to ensure that, where possible, there was alignment in terms of the processes of the RPL MTT and the SAQA RPL reference group, as well as to share information and progress at relevant points:

- The task team met with the SAQA RPL reference group on two occasions:
  - The chairperson of the RPL MTT made a brief presentation of the terms of reference of the RPL MTT to a workshop organised by the SAQA RPL reference group, and at which the invitation for submissions to the RPL MTT was extended; and
  - A meeting took place between the full RPL MTT and three members of SAQA's RPL reference group that is currently reviewing and renewing the national RPL policy.
- A meeting was set up with Mr Botshabelo Maja, a member of the Task Team on SETA Performance who is employed at the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (Palama). The aim of the meeting was to better understand whether any

recommendations (particularly relating to the grants and levy system) from the SETA Performance MTT might have implications for the thinking of the RPL MTT.

- The task team met with Advocate Eben Boshoff of the DHET, regarding the process, mechanisms and timeframes in terms of which a statutory institute can be set up.
- A meeting was set up with Mr Ken Duncan, chairperson of the Ministerial Task Team to establish the South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET), in order for the RPL MTT to better understand the mandate of that proposed Institute and to contribute to its own thinking of where to locate the proposed RPL institute.

### **1.3.2 Parameters of the literature, existing research, and document and policy review**

As per the task team's terms of reference, an extensive review of both international RPL models and practices and local RPL literature and research was commissioned. The RPL MTT is also grateful to SAQA for providing it with additional reviews: one on international RPL models in The Netherlands, Canada and the USA; and a case study of the legislation governing RPL in France.

In addition to the reviews referred to above, the RPL MTT perused, among other things, relevant policies and related documents of SAQA, the HRDC-SA, the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), and the quality councils, as well as the reports of those relevant Ministerial Task Teams that had already submitted draft reports to the Minister.

### **1.3.3 Primary research undertaken for the RPL MTT process**

With support from SAQA, the task team undertook research into RPL practices in all 21 SETAs. Interviews were conducted with CEOs, ETQA managers and senior staff, and quantitative data were provided by SETAs on various aspects of RPL provision.

The task team undertook desktop research into funding and resourcing approaches and models for RPL internationally, and supplemented these data with interviews with a few key local funders.

Unfortunately, the RPL MTT had neither the time nor the funding to commission additional research, for example, undertaking an audit of current practices in the higher education sector (the last one undertaken was in 2003).

## 1.4 Vision for RPL implementation

In South Africa, RPL carries particular significance as it is central to an inclusive, democratic education and training system. It is part of a national drive to build a learning culture in every family, village, township and city.

The vision is to challenge conventional knowledge hierarchies, in the interests of widening access to lifelong learning opportunities for adults who can contribute to the production of new knowledge, in the interests of social, economic and environmental justice and sustainability.

RPL has a dual purpose: on the one hand, social justice; and, on the other, access to opportunities for lifelong learning to enhance economic, environmental, social and personal development.

RPL is emancipatory in that it provides opportunities:

- For those unfairly denied these opportunities in the past;
- For reducing inequalities in society that are based on privileging certain forms of knowledge over others;
- For people to be formally recognised and honoured for what they already know; and
- For people to participate in the formal economy and contribute to society through creative and meaningful work.

RPL provides access to lifelong learning opportunities and to the global knowledge economy:

- Through an education and training system that enables articulation and mobility within and across different pathways;
- Through alternative routes to formal education and training; and
- Through skills development.

Although efforts to integrate RPL principles into the design and delivery of qualifications and programmes over the past 15 years have been relatively few, fruitful lessons have been learnt:

- Firstly, it has been shown that RPL can succeed in its purposes through appropriate and credible teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Secondly, these successes help to restore confidence in the national learning system and in its capacity to engage with cultures of knowledge and learning that characterise the struggle for survival and transformation in many marginalised communities.
- Thirdly, while acknowledging the complex relationships between different forms of knowledge and their associated learning pathways, 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.

- Finally, 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'.

The vision for an RPL strategy in South Africa is guided by the above principles, and the lessons learnt.

However, for RPL to be fully realised as part of a democratic learning system, it needs to be given concrete expression in the policies and practices of education and training providers and practitioners, and these must be properly resourced. Statutory bodies, quality councils, and public and private providers at all levels in the system must be supported in building the capacity to provide and sustain quality RPL programmes and services, where they are most needed.

The role of RPL, in providing alternative routes of access to further and higher education and training programmes, is vital in the promotion and delivery of a national 'returning to learning' strategy for unemployed and under-qualified youth and adults. It is pivotal to building a learning nation.

## 1.5 Terminology and definitions

All the definitions in this section, except for 'post-school' education and training, have been adopted from the draft document *Policy and Criteria for the Recognition of Prior Learning*, currently in development by SAQA's RPL reference group (SAQA 2012).<sup>6</sup>

**Credit accumulation** means the totalling 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.

---

<sup>6</sup> The intention is that the separate processes for the development of the RPL policy and the national implementation strategy speak to one another. At the level of terminology, this means that consistent definitions must be adopted. Furthermore, once the RPL policy has been finalised, the terminology in the current report and the implementation strategy should be revised accordingly.

**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.

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

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

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

**Non-formal learning** means learning that 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.

**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.

**Post-school** is defined as including any and all training and education that takes place after a learner leaves school, regardless of the grade at which a learner exits the school sector.

**Professional body** means any body of expert practitioners in an occupational field, and includes an occupational body.

**Qualification** means a planned combination of learning outcomes that 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 the 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, RPL endorses the value of giving recognition to knowledge and skills that have been acquired outside a formal learning programme. As a process, RPL 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.

**RPL practitioner** means a person who is a member of the RPL Practitioner Association supported by the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL in accordance with criteria established for this purpose. In the current document, RPL ‘advisors’, ‘trainers’, ‘assessors’ and ‘moderators’ are all RPL practitioners.

## 1.6 Outline of the report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows: Chapter 2 summarises and analyses key history, themes and issues from the international literature and research, as well as South African initiatives (focusing on RPL implementation, research and emerging institutional and sectoral models/approaches).

Chapters 3–5 deal with stakeholder responses, research into RPL in SETAs, funding and resourcing, and legislative and policy issues.

Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the key issues emerging from the preceding chapters.

Chapter 7 presents key recommendations through the draft National RPL Implementation Strategy and a high-level action plan.

## Chapter 2: Literature review: RPL models, practices and research

This literature review draws extensively on knowledge of international RPL acquired over the past two decades. RPL systems that include some form of ‘centre’ are addressed by way of case studies. Three cases (Norway – the Vox Centre; The Netherlands – the Knowledge Centre/*Kenniscentrum*; and Portugal – the New Opportunities Centres) are covered in detail, followed by shorter cases that pull out relevant insights from Australia, Canada, England, France, Belgium-Flanders and the European Union.

South African literature and research is then addressed in a thematically organised review.

The chapter ends with a commentary and recommendations for the task team.

### 2.1 Review of international ‘good’ practice in terms of country practices overview

#### 2.1.1 Status of RPL in national education and training systems, legislative and policy frameworks, overall approaches and key drivers

##### *Policy and legal environments are generally enabling of RPL:*

RPL enjoys official status in most of the contexts reviewed. Without enabling policy and legal environments, attempts at RPL tend to flounder in the face of unanticipated systemic blockages.

##### *The unmistakable stamp of history and culture on RPL*

A key point in all the cases is the cultural systems into which RPL in its various guises has been inserted, and the way that these continue to shape the nature of practice and attitudes.

##### *Tendency to mainstream RPL*

NQFs tend to mainstream RPL and orient it to ‘employability’ and efficiency. However, this is an elision rather than a rupture, and elements of the old continue to co-exist with the new depending on cultural context. Portugal is particularly interesting because RPL has a redress imperative.

##### *High-level inter-ministerial collaboration is required*

By far the best arrangements for developing and sustaining RPL are inter-ministerial, that is, not confined to education and training. This is particularly necessary if RPL is to impact on employment and workplace practices. The Netherlands is the best example of inter-ministerial collaboration (six ministries involved in the Learning and Work initiative).

### ***Integrated versus differentiated approaches***

In most countries, RPL began as a bottom-up process. After a period of trying to integrate and streamline practices into common procedures, there now seems to be a move back to differentiation. For example, the current revision of the European guidelines on RPL focuses on guidance for specific target groups rather than generic guidelines.

### **2.1.2 Status of the RPL centres, roles in mainstreaming RPL, approaches to resources and funding**

#### ***Proximity versus more distance from government***

The centres selected for this review enjoy varying relations to government. Generally speaking, an arm's length relationship with government allows an organisation to pursue a broader agenda.

#### ***RPL is often not the sole focus of a centre's remit***

In addition to RPL, Vox (in Norway) has professional responsibility for basic skills, immigrant integration and career guidance; and operational responsibility for study associations, distance learning institutions, peace centres and human rights centres. The Dutch *Kenniscentrum* is mainly dedicated to RPL but very much in the context of learning and work (i.e. work-based learning).

#### ***Regional and local centres as access points***

Regional delivery systems for RPL feature in most of the cases: local development projects in Norway; regional centres and one-stop shops in The Netherlands; a network of *Points Relais Conseil* in France; New Opportunities Centres in Portugal; and confederations of one university and at least one non-university higher education institution in Belgium-Flanders.

#### ***Co-located centres and access points***

While some RPL centres are stand-alone, many are co-located with existing organisations, such as higher education institutions, job centres, colleges, employment contexts, third-sector organisations, local government associations, private organisations, vocational education and training (VET) centres of expertise, and upper secondary schools.

#### ***Multi-agency collaboration***

Multi-agency collaboration is a common feature in the delivery of RPL, involving: local authorities, social partners, job agencies and education providers in The Netherlands; education and training providers (at all levels, public and private), businesses, associations, local authorities and the third sector in Portugal; and post-secondary institutions, professional associations, industry, unions, employers, private training organisations, immigrant-serving agencies, non-profit organisations and the provincial government in the British Columbia Plan in Canada. The French *Points Relais Conseil* have successfully brought RPL into regional planning and small business development.



### *Structures, staffing and resourcing*

Structures and staffing level vary depending on the remit of the centre and available funding. At the 'high end' is Vox (in Norway), a multi-million Euro organisation; at the low end is the small-scale not-for-profit PLA<sup>7</sup> Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia in Canada. The literature also draws attention to the hidden costs of RPL for ministries, universities and companies. The European 'peer cluster on recognition of learning outcomes' has yet to report on the costs and benefits of RPL, but what is abundantly clear is that RPL is not a 'cheap option'.

### **2.1.3 Scope, scale and type of RPL in different sectors (including practitioner identity and development)**

#### *Varying scope of RPL*

In Norway and Portugal the majority of RPL seems to take place in relation to secondary education qualifications, although open access to trade tests has stood the test of time in Norway. In the early years, the Dutch *Kenniscentrum* focused on vocational education, large companies and significant economic sectors but now also supports small companies, higher professional education institutions, re-integration companies and volunteer organisations in a more devolved way.

#### *RPL in the workplace*

Workplace RPL and RPL in education and training are dissimilar sets of social practices, dependant on different variables. Importantly, most of the cases reviewed benefit from reasonably robust and well-seasoned social partner approaches to industrial relations, which greatly enhance the possibility of successful workplace RPL. Generally, employers need to be incentivised to consider RPL and this tends to take the form of tax breaks. Despite countless lists of rather benign 'benefits' of RPL to all stakeholders, the fact is that RPL is very much a political and economic process in workplaces, especially where there is no history of consensual social partner relations.

#### *RPL and the unemployed*

Working with the unemployed and jobseekers requires inter-ministerial cooperation. Some progress has been made in Norway and The Netherlands in this regard.

#### *RPL activity in the third sector:*

Third-sector RPL activity is most common in Portugal (where adult education and development are linked). There is little evidence of it elsewhere, and in reality the character of the third sector varies enormously, from scouting in Norway to local economic regeneration in Portugal.

---

<sup>7</sup> Prior Learning Assessment

### *Increase in activity in higher education*

Reports on the amount of RPL in higher education vary but suggest an upward curve in Europe because of the Bologna processes. In most higher education contexts, programmes in health and social care are most conducive to RPL.

### *Drift to more summative types of RPL*

In most cases, a staged model of RPL exists (consisting of four to six stages). Approaches to RPL are increasingly individualised and summative in orientation. This seems to go hand-in-hand with the development of outcomes-based qualifications and qualification frameworks. Formative and/or supported approaches (alongside summative approaches) are found in Portugal, where there is face-to-face 'diagnosis' and 'guidance' within a six-stage RPL model. Whether formative or summative, RPL works best if it is part of a supported entry into career development and further qualifications, rather than an end in itself.

### *Greatly varying methods*

In Norway, the interview is common as an assessment method, as are portfolio development and vocational testing. The Dutch model is also oriented to individual portfolios. A recent trend is to favour dialogue, learning conversations (Evans et al. 2009), professional conversations (Maher 2011) and/or competence conversations (Van Kleef 2012, and forthcoming). Methods in Portugal are very much driven by adult education and development principles and practices, with mediating pedagogies rather than instrumental matching and mapping procedures.

### *High-level responsibility for quality assuring RPL*

Quality assurance has caused problems in the cases and literature reviewed. Experience and evidence suggest that overall responsibility needs to be held at state/national level, with corresponding opportunities for self- and peer-assessment of quality.

### *New professional identities*

Various practitioners inhabit the RPL space depending on context and sector. In France and Belgium-Flanders, RPL assessment is undertaken by a jury rather than an individual assessor and this affects the nature of roles and identities. It is interesting to note that only existing professionals can undertake RPL activities in The Netherlands. The Portuguese case refers to the emergence of a new group of RPL professionals, that is, postgraduate-level adult educators with extensive experience. Although much RPL practitioner training is role based and ad hoc, moves are afoot to formalise and professionalise training in most contexts (including some pan-European developments).

## 2.2 Review of RPL research and practice in South Africa

### 2.2.1 Early RPL pilot projects: 1997–2003

#### *Piloting and experimentation: The JET 'demonstration models'*

The Joint Education Trust (JET) was an early initiator of RPL. The JET Workers Higher Education Project (WHEP) – which was supported by the Ford Foundation, and by Professor Elana Michelson of Empire State College, State University of New York representing the US Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) – became involved in the planning and provision of training courses on RPL, curriculum development and workforce advising, adapting materials from the USA to take account of South African social, cultural and historical realities. This was supported by national workshops including one titled “Helping Workers to Return to Formal Learning” (JET 1998: 14).

As the policy process was unfolding a range of literature and research began to emerge based on RPL experiments and pilots. The *JET Bulletin* (JET 1998) documents “demonstration models” that were undertaken through WHEP, including inter alia: teacher education and adult education; management; and agriculture/rural development. Although each model/pilot had slightly different emphases, what united them was their “challenges to higher education and workplace practice” – the topic of a national conference in 2000. The conference proceedings (JET 2000) go beyond the “demonstration models” to include broader reports on the progress of RPL in the Department of Labour, the Department of Education, trade unions and SAQA, as well as tabling a national strategy for RPL (with calls to balance the focus on higher education with research and innovation in the FET sector). The mood of the conference was forward looking and enthusiastic, although cautionary notes were sounded from higher education quarters regarding capacity: “...unless...processes are in line with the capacity of institutions, both resource and human capacity, implementation of policy will fail completely or not realise its full potential” (Badsha in JET 2000: 8); and, the danger of RPL being used as a way to “commodify and marketise” higher education in the name of increasing participation rates (Badat in JET 2000: 8).

The early “demonstration models” spawned much reflection and academic literature (and some action) over ensuing years, mainly because of the problems they threw up and early indications that RPL could not simply ‘be laminated onto’ the existing system. This literature is dealt with in later sections of the current review. Of particular note is the long-standing university preparation programme, in existence since 1993, at the University of the Free State (UFS); some 5,500 students have successfully completed the programme and gone on to do degrees at university. The UFS was involved in one of the JET demonstration projects; over time (and with assistance from De Paul University in Chicago) the project evolved into an adult-friendly bachelor degree in management leadership, launched in 2000.

The University of the Western Cape (UWC) was an early implementer of RPL, from 2000, within a lifelong learning framework (Walters 2005; Hendricks and Volbrecht 2003; Ralphs 2011), and contemporary developments are described in a later section (2.2.5) of the current report.

#### *Piloting and experimentation: HSRC, UCT and Peninsula Technikon*

At roughly the same time, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) funded a joint-venture research and development project with the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Peninsula Technikon. Titled “RPL in Higher Education”, the project involved detailed international case studies, and the design, implementation and evaluation of two RPL pilots in the institutions concerned (one in adult educator development and one in nursing).<sup>8</sup> The international cases studies (approximately 10) and other project reports are lodged in the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) at UCT. The main output was a book, *RPL: Power, Pedagogy and Possibility* (Harris 2000), which addresses the issue of RPL in higher and further education, and consists of two guides: a Conceptual Guide and an Implementation Guide. The former situates RPL within a range of contemporary social theory and analyses practices according to various understandings of knowledge, pedagogy, learning, experience, and learning from experience. The analyses are used to project possibilities and likely tolerances for certain forms of RPL under particular sets of contextual conditions in South Africa. The Implementation Guide takes the reader (someone who wants to investigate the feasibility of RPL in their education and training context) through a series of analytical and developmental tasks. Perhaps the nub of the book is the notion of trying to develop “optimally socially inclusive forms of RPL” that extend institutional tolerances to their maximum without negatively impacting on the core social project of the institution concerned. It is an idea that recurs in later SAQA research (outlined below).

#### *Piloting and experimentation: In the trade unions*

Meanwhile, in the trade union context, two salutary participatory action research projects took place. Documented retrospectively by Lugg et al. (1998), the projects highlighted a number of serious problems associated with RPL in the workplace. Firstly, there is the likely diversity of objectives between management and workers (productivity and skills audits versus regrading and wage increases respectively); secondly, there is the non-neutral nature of so-called objective, stakeholder-agreed standards (which due to their language, format and/or content may not ‘speak to’ workers’ knowledge); and thirdly, there is lack of clarity regarding the interface between literacy and workplace skills in terms of what is actually being assessed and what needs to be assessed. The experience of these projects informed the development of a Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) RPL policy (COSATU 2000), in which it is clearly stated that RPL is for social justice and that it needs to be firmly

---

<sup>8</sup> Echoing international practice, nursing education in South Africa has continued to engage with RPL and now has its own model and guidelines (see Khanyile 2005a and 2005b as well as earlier work).

located in a union mandate (see also Marock 2000). As noted in the previous section of this review, RPL is a political and economic phenomenon in workplaces.

Cooper (1998) took up the issue of trade unions and worker experience in *From Rolling Mass Action to RPL*, arguing that the advent of RPL had shifted labour movement discourses from the collective and transformative to the individual and human capital-oriented, running the risk of undermining solidarity. She takes trade union knowledge and pedagogies further in her thesis, titled *Towards a Theory of Pedagogy, Learning and Knowledge in an 'Everyday' Context: Case study of a South African trade union* (Cooper 2005), where she uses Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian understandings of learning as a social activity to study knowledge-generating processes in a particular union context (see also Cooper 2006).

Calls for RPL continue to emanate from the labour movement itself. Maboye (forthcoming) critiques the lack of implementation “for those who need it most” and argues for organised labour to play a larger role in upskilling its membership “for real development pathways, real employment benefits”.

### **2.2.2 Very little RPL in further education and training**

On their review visit to South Africa in 2008, the OECD team reported that it had expected to see greater use of RPL “for unemployed and underemployed adults in the age range of 40 to 60 years” (Gunning et al. 2008: 14). This is mirrored in the dearth of literature focusing on RPL in FET colleges (both public and private) over the years (aside from individual institutional RPL policies). In research for the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), Marock (2011) finds evidence that where RPL has been implemented it has proved very costly for candidates, and in some cases more expensive than enrolling on the formal programme. Lack of operating guidelines to accompany the policies that do exist seems to be an additional issue.

An important recent contribution is from Prinsloo (2009) in the form of a masters thesis investigating RPL policies and practices in two public FET colleges. Using a critical theory/Habermasian theoretical framework, his empirical research confirms the gap between policy rhetoric and RPL practice. He claims that where RPL does happen, social justice/redress intentions often become instrumental procedures in their enactment. He finds a lack of awareness about RPL among FET staff, high running costs, and a need for more practitioner support. Simplification of administrative procedures is recommended as well as increased partnerships between public and private FET providers if the sector as a whole is to provide a “platform for the massification of RPL implementation”.

A recent study undertaken by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) and the Further Education and Training Institute (FETI) of UWC argues the need for a well-

planned and managed transition towards a high-quality FET college system with expanded access, in order to produce more intermediate-level graduates. The study embraces the very real institution-building processes that are needed. It is interesting to note that RPL is not mentioned as part of the strategy (Stumpf et al. in Perold et al. 2012). Is this because the authors think that institution building will subsume RPL, or that institution building is a prerequisite for RPL?

### 2.2.3 Higher education RPL literature

As Breier (2011: 205) notes: “Local academics [have] produced numerous articles on the subject of RPL in higher education”. She summarises some of this work in terms of broad themes. Firstly, she mentions literature that provides *strong motivations in favour of RPL*, citing in this category Gawe 1999, Kistan 2002, Moore and Van Rooyen 2002, and Van Rooy 2002. Published in South African journals, these articles are mainly concerned with moving from RPL “principles to practice”. Motivating from a very different place, Hendricks and Volbrecht (2003) see promise for RPL by linking it to the African Renaissance.

Secondly, Breier (2011) talks about literature that adopts *a more cautious approach to RPL*, placing in this category articles by Geysers (1999, 2001), as well as Cretchley and Castle’s (2001) examination of areas of compatibility and difference between outcomes-based education (OBE), RPL and adult education, and their conclusion that problems stem from features of the higher education context rather than from OBE or RPL as such. A wide range of other literature also falls into the ‘cautious’ category. Castle and Atwood (2001) compare RPL for access and/or credit, arguing that the former has advantages over the latter in terms of not necessarily requiring direct equivalence between prior learning and formal curricula. Castle and Atwood (2001) also argue for pedagogical engagement with (and deepening of) prior knowledge *within* formal learning programmes in an adult-friendly way. Osman and Castle (2002, 2004) question whether RPL is a soft option in higher education in South Africa and discuss the challenges it raises for teaching and learning practices. In her PhD, Sutherland (2006) addresses issues relating to the implementation of RPL in higher education, arguing that the sector needs little convincing that RPL can be beneficial but that many systemic barriers stand in the way.

There is a third theme in the higher education literature that relates more specifically to *implementation*. Smith (2003) focused her PhD on a comprehensive strategy for South African technikons (see also Du Pré and Pretorius 2001; and Buchler 2002). Osman (2003, 2004a, 2004b) reflects on five JET RPL demonstration models in four higher education institutions and suggests that if institutions wish to derive a better understanding of themselves and their place within a transforming society, they need to recognise that policy framework and vision matter; clear aims matter; support from senior management matters; staff development matters; RPL advocacy matters; and curriculum change matters.

In terms of implementation at an *institutional level*, Frick et al. (2007) present a university case study analysing RPL policy at faculty level, pointing to “variances” in agreed-upon criteria for RPL – particularly regarding the conceptualisation and purpose of RPL. Those authors suggest that a similar methodology and analytical process could be used to design support systems for RPL in other institutions. There is a tranche of literature that focuses on *the role of UNISA*<sup>9</sup> in relation to RPL. The institution has its own policy (UNISA 2002) and is recognised as an early provider of RPL for adults. Several retrospectives have been undertaken (see Hlongwane 2008; Smith forthcoming; and Snyman forthcoming).

In her masters thesis, De Graaf (forthcoming) outlines approaches at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, where successful (but unqualified) managers with occupational knowledge and expertise can gain access to a Bachelor of Technology (B Tech) programme. She focuses on the RPL ‘knowledge claims’ made by the candidates, how these are assessed (and by what criteria), and how the candidates actually fare when on the mainstream programme. She concludes that they do reasonably well and do not need any more academic support than students who enter via more conventional routes.

Although there is not much actual literature on the subject, recent evidence suggests that universities of technology are making rapid progress, not only in RPL but, equally importantly, in articulation agreements with FET colleges. This is pre-eminently clear in informal reportage from an HE–FE articulation event organised and hosted by the CEPD in 2012 (CEPD and BCC 2012). While there remains much to do, there are a significant number of active partnerships at the level of programme/curricular scrutiny and alignment, articulation arrangements, alternative access opportunities, bridging courses, capacity building, upgrading of lecturer qualifications, and shared guidance services that include RPL. One partnership that stands out is a tripartite agreement between a university of technology, an FET college and a SETA to develop a customised access programme to higher education based at the college. What is interesting about these bottom-up developments and those in the trades and occupations (see below), is that they are evolving and gaining momentum in response to immediate and felt needs on the ground, suggesting nascent communities of professional practice and trust, which bodes well for the future.

A further tranche of literature and research seeks to *classify different types of RPL* in order to better understand ‘what they are really about’ as opposed to what they purport to be about (see Harris 1996 in this regard). Drawing on the four villages of experiential learning (Weil and McGill 1989) and from Butterworth (1992), Harris (1999) presented four RPL models, each directed to particular social purposes and executed through varying procedures in different contexts. Her first model is “Procrustean RPL”,<sup>10</sup> which as the name

---

<sup>9</sup> The University of South Africa

<sup>10</sup> This term was taken from work in Australia by Jones and Martin (1997) who state that: “According to Procrustes, a ruler in Greek mythology, everyone could fit into his bed regardless of their size and shape. If anyone was too short, he placed them on the rack and stretched them. If they were too long he would chop off their feet” (in Harris 1999: 138).

suggests, only recognises prior learning that fits a particular template, be that a bed or a unit standard – it is instrumental. The second model, “Learning and Development RPL”, is a supported and mediated form of RPL through which candidates learn as they are assessed, but they are still assessed according to existing standards – it is a model of orientation and induction. The third model, “Radical RPL”, seeks to foreground ‘subjugated’ knowledge and learning from experience over dominant forms of knowledge – it responds to particular readings of ‘transformation’. Her final model, “Trojan Horse RPL”, tries to bring prior learning/learning from experience into critical dialogue with formal knowledge and ways of knowing – it is dialogical and attempts to forge more equal relationships between knowledges and knowers. These models were expanded in *Power, Pedagogy and Possibility* (Harris 2000).

Other South African scholars have developed and improved upon these models. Building on one of the JET demonstration models (in agriculture/rural development), Lockett (1999) explores ‘difference’ in RPL in “cultural, cognitive and epistemic” terms, in an attempt to articulate the gap between potential RPL learners and a (historically white) university. She develops a set of epistemological frames through which to do this: technical, hermeneutic, critical, and post-modern; and uses these to consider the different understandings of curriculum knowledge, learning, experience and assessment that inhere in each, concluding by arguing for contextually specific RPL. Breier (2003) distinguishes between technical/market, liberal humanist and critical/radical approaches to RPL. Osman (2004a) emphasises the philosophical bases of the JET demonstration models by referring to credit exchange models based on human capital theory, developmental models based on liberal humanism, and radical transformative models based on critical theory.

An important and distinctively South African theme centres on *knowledge debates* in RPL. These debates are ongoing and focus on the contested relationships between ‘academic’/disciplinary/formal/curricular knowledge and experiential knowledge. They feed into different understandings of ‘equivalence’. Various positions are advanced. In *Whose Learning? Whose Knowledge?* Breier (1997) asks what knowledge is going to inhere in NQF standards and what would need to if RPL were to work.<sup>11</sup> This argument is further developed in Breier (1999): “current conceptualisations [of RPL] could be problematic in that they imply potential equivalence between informal and formal learning which might not be achievable in practice, or might not even be desirable” (1999: 120). She is arguing from a position of knowledge difference: “the relationship between abstract and concrete, context-independent and context-dependent modes of thought and knowledge” (Breier 2001).

---

<sup>11</sup> This is a point reiterated by Maboye (forthcoming: 112), arguing that “we need to ensure that the standards that workers are assessed against incorporate the kind of skills that workers have” and by Michelson (forthcoming: 226) that “unit standards of performance that have little to do with how work actually gets done and the knowledge it takes to do it” will be of little benefit to workplace RPL candidates.



As noted, in Harris (2000) a different perspective was adopted: that there are differences between forms of knowledge but these can be approached dialectically. She subsequently shifted this view in her PhD thesis (2004) to one of “know the borders and cross the lines”, arguing that mediation between different forms of knowledge is only possible under particular conditions. Conversely, Michelson (1997, 1999) argues that notions of knowledge difference have their roots in Western epistemologies based on Enlightenment distinctions between body and mind that have been critiqued by post-colonialist and feminist scholars. She approaches the knowledge question in RPL from the point of view of “epistemological authority”, arguing for attention to be paid to knowledge production in situations of profound inequality.

In Marock’s (2011) research with higher education RPL practitioners, one interviewee gave an example of successfully developing an RPL access mechanism focusing on “ability to learn”, rather than on matching prior learning against (qualification) standards or course content. This resonates with some of the literature reviewed in the preceding international case studies, where general conceptual, cognitive and intellectual abilities are used as assessment criteria. Such an approach arguably diffuses some of the knowledge debates by setting them to one side and focusing on more generic competences. A further option is suggested by Breier (2005): she terms it “rpl” as opposed to “RPL”, to refer to the recruitment of prior learning *within* a mainstream programme and pedagogical context. Ralphs (2011) uses the term “in-curriculum” RPL to refer to the same process.

Building on the JET demonstration model in teacher education, Shalem and Steinberg (2002, 2006)<sup>12</sup> evaluate the social logic of RPL portfolio development as a pedagogical process. Their empirical analysis reveals ambiguous RPL pedagogies that are both retrospective (the recognition of previously attained learning) and prospective (the assessment of readiness for a new learning environment). They argue that these two ‘actions’ are incompatible in terms of their underlying assumptions about knowledge. The former suggests that forms of knowledge are similar and equivalent, whereas the latter implies difference and specialised knowledge bases into which RPL candidates have to be inducted using a more visible pedagogical style.

Staying with teacher education, an important strand of research literature emerged as a result of the NPDE, which was launched in 2001/02 to upgrade the qualifications of approximately 40,000 school teachers with a minimum of a one-year qualification and/or five years of teaching experience. The concept of RPL was included in the planning of this ambitious, large-scale initiative. The Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP) SETA commissioned research to track the RPL process and the relationship between it and the NPDE curriculum. Volbrecht et al. (2006) report on a form of ‘rpl’ (or in-curriculum RPL)

---

<sup>12</sup> See also Shalem (2001) for a discussion of ‘fields’ of academic practice and how they link to processes of recognition.

located *within* the NPDE programme rather than *before* it. The rationale for this was to allow the teacher to learn about academic expectations *before* considering their own prior experience in relation to them. This, Volbrecht (2009) argues, combined elements of Harris's "learning and development" and "Trojan Horse" approaches to RPL in a distinctive and potentially transformative way. The teacher upgrading experience led Breier (2008) and Breier with Ralphs (2010) to introduce the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) into the RPL knowledge debates, to refer to (in this case, teachers') knowledge that does not fit with the formal/informal dualism; that is, knowledge that carries "a strong sense of morality and of community" emphasising "the particular in the light of general – and crucially, ethical – ideals" (Breier 2008: 182; Breier with Ralphs 2009).

#### 2.2.4 RPL in trades, occupational sectors and workplaces

The amount of available literature suggests that the level of RPL activity in trades, occupational sectors and workplaces has increased in the past five years or so. This may be the result of a rise in the number of private RPL consultants specialising in particular sectors. What is noteworthy is the very wide array of stakeholders and role-players involved in any RPL initiative in the workplace, and that such initiatives are more likely to take place at *critical moments* in the industry. Botha (forthcoming) provides three such examples. The first is with older, experienced but unqualified workers in the forestry industry at a critical moment when new standards-based qualifications were available, when materials had been developed and when both the SETA and the unions were on board. The second intervention, in the chemical industry, arose because of updated qualifications that meant that existing assessors and moderators had to undergo confirmation/upgrades of their subject matter expertise. This critical moment, along with a SETA-wide interest in RPL, took this particular initiative further. Finally, in the metals and engineering sector, SETA commitment and union involvement were the drivers for training RPL champions.

The literature highlights the sheer logistical complexity of developing and sustaining RPL in trades and occupational contexts, especially when dealing with several SETAs, workplaces and awarding bodies. The advances made by Deller (2003, 2004, 2007a, 2007b) and Deller et al. (n.d.) are important in this regard. The case is made that workplace contexts are so different from one another, and from education and training institutions, that no definitive or static model of RPL can be conceptualised or applied. This echoes the international literature reviewed. Taking this into account, Deller (2007a) managed to develop a 'logic model' for the implementation of RPL that caters for the needs of the working adults in a typical working environment.

The complexity of workplace RPL is also prominent in the Lloyd (forthcoming) report on the human resources needed to develop RPL procedures in response to new regulatory requirements and licences to practice in the insurance industry (2002–09) (see also Deller

2007b; and Nortier and Mackenzie forthcoming). The Bank SETA has also been involved in a successful RPL project, involving thousands of bank sector employees in order to ensure compliance with the FAIS legislation.

The plethora of interests, requirements (including legal compliance requirements) and operating procedures across the industry, professional bodies, quality councils, awarding bodies, SETAs, ETQAs, higher education institutions, specialist colleges, employers, and qualifications/certificates/unit standards/grades and symbols (historical and current) is overwhelming (see also King 2003, on the same issue). The result is a set of very complex procedures linking these interests and requirements to the design and implementation of RPL processes for thousands of multiple-first-language employees. The procedures involved the development of equivalence matrices, complex mappings, multiple assessment methods and tools (including national examinations and assignments), and learning materials. Thus, it is very clear that workplace RPL will vary across sites, contexts and sectors, but as the RPL implementation in certain sectors indicates, it is achievable to undertake.

### **2.2.5 The SAQA UWC RPL research project**

Knowledge and pedagogy are the focus of the current SAQA UWC research project “RPL as Specialised Pedagogy”. Here the starting position is one of knowledge difference, and the focus is on the specialised pedagogies that are needed to support RPL as a process of mediation and navigation between different sites of practice (Ralphs 2009, 2011, 2012). The project is underpinned by a redress imperative, plus the need to take account of the weak foundational education of many RPL candidates. The research allows for development and testing of a conceptual framework for theorising and operationalising RPL as a pedagogical practice. It involves four RPL sites: a private provider specialising in trades and occupations; two public universities; and the Workers’ College in KwaZulu-Natal. Extensive empirical research has been undertaken and each site has completed a baseline Phase 1 research report (Cooper with Jones 2011; Mthembu and Ngalamulume 2010; Cooper and Jones 2012; Deller with Ralphs 2012; Ralphs 2012). The reports are almost ethnographic in the amount of case detail they provide and offer a major resource for comparative work and the development of a conceptual framework.

### **2.2.6 Low take-up, so far...**

Several large-scale quantitative studies of the extent of RPL implementation in higher education have been undertaken over the years. The first, by Breier and Osman (2000), under the auspices of the Education Policy Unit at UWC, found that only four institutions had written RPL policies at that time. Nationwide, approximately 250 RPL candidates had been admitted to university programmes (RPL for access) and about 100 to technikons (RPL for access and credit). A later survey (Breier with Burgess 2003) found a significant increase

in the use of RPL by higher education institutions, in line with both the promulgation of policy and rising expectations.

However, for all the literature and research, actual take up of RPL on the ground remains sluggish in South Africa as in other parts of the world. As Sam Isaacs (2010) reported: “the inclusion of non-formal and informal learning in an NQF is always going to be a challenge, but cannot be ignored...we need to collectively find new ways to address this key challenge that forms a critically important part of an NQF”. Bolton (forthcoming) presents a similar picture of difficult implementation, using that as the stimulus for a revitalised agenda for RPL.

## **2.3 Key themes and implications emerging from the literature, research, document and policy process review**

Much of the literature asserts grand and bold claims for RPL, but deeper examination reveals a very complex and power-laden process that is expensive and difficult to make succeed unless there is the political will – it is not ‘business as usual’. This needs to be recognised first and foremost. Nevertheless, the ‘cost’ of RPL must be assessed against the benefits and costs of recognition compared with the benefits and costs of formal learning, as well as against the broader socio-economic, political and social justice imperatives and impacts. One caution is that RPL in South Africa must provide possibilities for career pathing and must therefore develop alongside greatly increased flexible learning provision opportunities for adults, at all levels of education and training – ABET, FET and higher education and training – with part-time provision receiving much greater emphasis, within a lifelong learning philosophy and approach.

The specific purposes of RPL need to be thought through and articulated, beyond the general vision of ‘access’ and ‘redress’, and specifically in terms of what applicants may gain from participating in recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes processes. This would not only enhance the credibility of and buy-in to RPL but would also facilitate the identification of all stakeholders and proper planning: for instance, RPL for adults and for youth entail very different approaches.

### **2.3.1 Approaches to RPL: Integrated versus differentiated**

In most countries RPL began as a bottom-up process, with enablers and drivers defined by the particular cultural context. After a period of trying to integrate and streamline practices into common procedures, there now seems to be a move back to differentiation. For example, the current revision of the European RPL guidelines is focusing on guidance for

specific target groups rather than on generic guidelines. The South African literature also demonstrates that RPL models and practices need to be sector- and contextually specific.

The literature shows it is virtually impossible to find RPL methods that have credibility and legitimacy in both the workplace and the education system. This is underscored in the Australian case, where the characteristics of two very different sets of RPL practices are unpacked. In workplaces, RPL needs to connect to industry- or company-specific in-house training, classification systems and benchmarks, skills bands, HR practices, labour relations and collective bargaining, pay scales and so on, while also articulating to the learning outcomes of FET or higher education programmes and associated qualifications (i.e. the characteristics of RPL in education systems).

### **2.3.2 RPL centres and delivery**

The case studies presented in the literature reviewed show varying relations of RPL centres to government. Where national RPL centres are established to implement education and training reforms, and enhance the relationship between the sectors, they have a close relationship with government. Where overall responsibility for RPL is devolved to states, provinces or territories, centres concerned with RPL also vary in their degree of proximity to particular government objectives. On the whole, as already mentioned, an arm's length relationship with government allows an organisation to pursue a broader and more critical agenda.

RPL centres may play an intermediary role between government and traditionally decentralised activities. They have operational and/or professional responsibilities. Operational responsibilities generally include disbursing government funds for provisioning across a broad portfolio, not just RPL. The regional assessment centres may also collect data on the candidates who have undergone validation, which are aggregated into a national register/database. Professional responsibilities may include developing infrastructure for the implementation of RPL across all sectors; advising and assisting providers; knowledge dissemination; research; and training, resource development, advocacy and networking.

Regional delivery systems for RPL are a feature in most of the cases. While some centres are stand-alone, many regional and local RPL centres and access points are co-located with existing organisations, such as higher education institutions, job centres, colleges, employment contexts, community organisations, local government associations, private organisations, VET centres of expertise, and upper secondary schools.

### **2.3.3 Guidance and counselling**

Guidance and counselling services are recognised to be crucial to the successful delivery of RPL services. This would be at two levels: during the RPL process itself (taking into account that RPL is more than just assessment); and in the form of adult-friendly and appropriate forms of career guidance, which would require a deeper understanding of career pathing, for example, than would normally be provided to school-leavers, and which would need to take into account a wider range of services, including areas such as guidance services for retrenched workers and so on.

### **2.3.4 Quality assurance**

Quality assurance of RPL is problematic. However, experience and evidence suggest that overall responsibility needs to be held at state/national level and – because quality inheres in communities of practice – with corresponding capacity development at decentralised levels for ongoing self- and peer-assessment of quality.

### **2.3.5 Scope and form of RPL**

The scope of RPL varies across contexts and over time and includes RPL in the workplace; RPL for the unemployed, linked to job creation opportunities; RPL in civil society organisations; and RPL in further and higher education – in particular, in health and social services. RPL is intrinsic to the EU policies on, and funding for, lifelong learning. An important point is that different RPL interventions, funding and arrangements must be considered for youth and adults.

Over time there has been a drift to more individualised and summative types of RPL, although more formative and/or supported approaches (alongside summative approaches) are to be found, such as in Portugal where there are extensive processes of face-to-face ‘diagnosis’ and ‘guidance’ within the six-stage RPL model. Whether formative or summative, RPL seems to work best if it is a part of a supported entry into career development and further qualifications, rather than an end in itself.

Methods of RPL assessment vary greatly, including interviews with candidates, portfolio development, vocational ‘testing’, and a recent trend towards favouring dialogue, learning conversations (Evans et al. 2009), professional conversations (Maher 2011) and/or competence conversations (Van Kleef 2012, and forthcoming). Methods may be driven by adult education and development principles and practices, while in other contexts there may well be less of a mediating pedagogy and more of an instrumental matching and mapping procedure.

In most cases, prior learning is assessed by matching it against formal standards that have not been created specifically for RPL purposes. In contrast, Portugal has developed a system whereby qualifications and standards are recontextualised for adults and RPL purposes, to render such qualifications and standards more relevant and accessible without sacrificing parity of esteem of outcome. This happens especially in relation to basic and secondary education qualifications and vocational and technical education and training.

Another important difference that emerges from the cases is the use of generic competencies or level and programme descriptors for RPL purposes that address general conceptual, cognitive and intellectual ability rather than being tied to particular competence statements, programmes, subjects or content areas. In France, for example, the emphasis in summative practices is on problem solving and critical thinking.

Although much is made of the importance of having adult-friendly learning institutions and programmes, they remain conspicuous by their absence except, for example, in parts of the USA. However, in The Netherlands, two-year associate degrees have recently been introduced into higher professional education. Aimed at intermediate-level skilling, these degrees, into which RPL is embedded, attract adults and school-leavers alike. A South African example of this is the UFS adult-friendly Bachelor Degree in Management Leadership, launched in 2000. In The Netherlands, private as well as public sector education and training institutions can offer RPL as long they are registered with the Knowledge Centre/*Kenniscentrum* and adhere to the quality code. There is, however, a strong push in the EU currently for the promotion of lifelong learning universities, with the *Charter for Lifelong Learning Universities* being adopted in 2008. RPL is integral to this charter.

International literature shows that RPL implementation is generally patchy and uneven, and not on the large scale for which one would hope. Reasons for this include a lack of confidence on the part of providers; doubts about the validity and reliability of assessment via RPL and quality criteria to be used; concerns from higher education that RPL undermines the knowledge base of disciplines and academic programmes; critique of the neo-liberal discourses of policy reform of which RPL forms a part; high costs and anxiety about return on investment; and conflicting interests in workplace RPL. This echoes the opening statement of this section, which acknowledges that RPL is a contested, complex and power-laden process, which requires political will supported by strong advocacy mechanisms if it is to gain traction.

### **2.3.6 Other points to consider**

- In all contexts, the potent and direct association between RPL and increased self-esteem cannot be overlooked, especially in countries concerned with nation building.

- Some of the cases suggest conflict of interest between the needs of youth and adults. Does this hold true in South Africa, where many `youth` have `adult` economic and parenting responsibilities? This will require more research.
- If RPL is not going to be a dead end, it is necessary to link it to education and training programmes that in turn are linked to creation of more jobs and work opportunities.
- The issue of equivalence, between different forms of knowledge, for example, is to be found across national RPL systems, and has not necessarily been resolved.
- Costs are increasingly prohibitive; for example, cost-cutting in France has led to RPL only being undertaken by those who are already engaged adult learners.
- `Where there's a will there's a way' – in The Netherlands, in response to a skills shortage, teachers were allowed to continue to practise while they completed an individualised education plan to demonstrate and gain all the necessary competencies.

### **2.3.7 Recommendations for the South African context**

In order to contribute to both social justice and socio-economic development, RPL requires a set of enabling circumstances. These include:

- A mission and agenda that is state and stakeholder driven and is accountable to both the state and stakeholders;
- Alignment with current goals and initiatives, as articulated in recent policy documents;
- Clear and effective mechanisms for resourcing the direct and indirect costs of RPL;
- An understanding of RPL as a power- and culture-laden social process, rather than simply a technical exercise;
- Explicit interventions to overcome the cultural and organisational legacy of the apartheid workplace;
- Respectful attention to workers' knowledge, indigenous knowledge and other knowledge traditions outside the formal, Eurocentric academy;
- A critical mass of expertise, including a system for training professional RPL advisors, trainers, assessors and moderators in leading practices;
- An understanding of RPL as a pedagogical device that brings prior and future learning into dialogue;
- Clear access to related learning pathways for future learning; and
- RPL being both centralised and mainstreamed, while being delivered locally.



## Chapter 3: Consultations with key national stakeholders, and commissioned research into SETA RPL practices

This chapter focuses on two sources of primary information or data solicited by the RPL MTT: key national stakeholders; and SETAs, in particular.

While the task team conducted consultations with and encouraged submissions from a small number of key stakeholders, it was also recognised that very little is known about RPL implementation in workplace contexts or in occupationally related qualifications – key areas of oversight of the SETA ETQAs. Deciding that research into SETA RPL practices was critical, especially given that the SETA system, under the oversight of the QCTO, is likely to play a much stronger role in future in the implementation of the national RPL strategy, the task team commissioned such research.

The current chapter summarises the findings from the consultation process and the commissioned research.

### 3.1 Consultations with key national stakeholders

The questions posed to the key stakeholders/role-players focused on their extensive experience of implementing RPL and the challenges that need to be addressed. Their recommendations for what needs to be included in the national strategy were also solicited.

Submissions were received from the following: two higher education role-players; one labour education organisation; an individual who works extensively with RPL in the FET college sector; and an individual who is a registered RPL assessor.

Stakeholders/role-players raised the following key issues:<sup>13</sup>

#### *The nature of RPL and other overarching issues*

- One submission raised a caution about balancing the rhetoric (and ideologies driving RPL) and (sometimes unrealistic) expectations about RPL versus RPL as an education and pedagogical practice.
- “There is no deliberate link made between RPL and current economic, social, political and cultural dynamics to break away [from] or challenge the current dominant discourses.”
- “There is insufficient awareness by oppressed and exploited communities of the potential and value of RPL.”

---

<sup>13</sup> Their inputs are quoted verbatim where practical.

- “If the purpose of RPL is only accreditation, then it loses its broader potential for being a process that can deal with redress, restoring self-confidence, healing, building social cohesion, recognising other forms of knowledge.”
- “Ironically, good practice in RPL is often curtailed by a regulated environment. One needs to ensure that good RPL practice is enhanced by effective policies.”
- “Lack of an overarching national policy on RPL. SAQA has attempted to provide leadership in this regard. However the SETAs, professional bodies and higher education institutions and FET institutions have varying policies that speak to RPL specific to their sector. Though this is important, the difficulty occurs when considering the recognition of their RPL practices and processes when trying to establish articulation routes between them.”
- “In comparison with academic knowledge, RPL is still seen as a means of redress rather than as an alternative, equal knowledge base.”
- There is no holistic link between prior learning experiences and indigenous knowledge systems.
- The distinction between skills/practice and theory, similar to the distinction between experience and knowledge, prevails within the RPL discourse and application, just as it prevails within the higher education sphere, which leads to class and other distinctions.
- The manner in which RPL is researched, defined and viewed is within an academic paradigm that does not understand, or limits or fails to interpret, the prior learning within particular social contexts.
- Conceptual issues:
  - The inclusion of RPL in discussions of other concepts, such as experiential learning or lifelong learning, can be problematic – these concepts should not be conflated with or reduced to RPL, as RPL may only be an aspect of the concept (and then sometimes only tangentially).
  - We need to better understand the conceptual, pedagogical and practical differences in the different types of RPL articulated in the literature.
  - Understandings of issues of equivalence need to be deepened.
  - Our approaches to curriculum development need to be improved so that we are able to recognise new or other knowledges.
- “We have to realistically assess whether RPL is (or should be) meeting the needs of those marginalised from formal systems of work and education. This does not mean that interventions in respect of these target groups are not essential, but that RPL may not be the best intervention...RPL cannot replace the need for educational programmes, especially if language, literacy and numeracy are the main barriers to accessing further learning.”
- “Levels of literacy, language barriers, and access to power and resources limit the extent to which oppressed and exploited communities can realise and use their prior learning for the greater good of society.”

- “Given that RPL is multidimensional and multi-contextual, we need a single ‘safety net’, which will safeguard the integrity of all the different forms of RPL...but it is clear that our current quality assurance models do not necessarily engender trust, and do not necessarily ensure integrity of processes. However, we need something that protects both the practitioners and the candidates – perhaps quality assurance combined with strong communities of practice, where best practice is shared and where exemplars are developed and tested.”

### *Issues in relation to higher education*

- Both of the higher education role-player submissions noted the concern that applications to study at higher education institutions are oversubscribed by school-leavers. This means that the institutions are under no pressure to consider adult applicants who may have special requirements or who cannot, for various reasons, be admitted to programmes via fulfilment of the usual entry requirements. Many institutions also face financial and human resource constraints to offering additional labour-intensive (and administratively complex) services such as RPL. Thus, target-setting for RPL is unlikely to occur unless financial support is provided.
- The availability of RPL and its implementation varies widely both within and across higher education institutions.
- There are issues of articulation of qualifications and unit standards at lower levels, which prohibits people from accessing higher education, and this impacts on RPL.
- Assessed work experience components of vocational and occupational qualifications would facilitate RPL and access into higher education.
- The continued existence of the 50% residency clause<sup>14</sup> has been raised as a barrier to RPL implementation in higher education, despite the fact that part of the related legislation has been repealed. Many people are calling for its removal, but the view presented in this submission is that the residency clause is not about RPL (although it has a significant impact on RPL). Its removal may have unintended consequences in other aspects of higher education.
- The composition of the learning programmes at higher education institutions (often course-based, as opposed to modular) means that RPL is often administratively difficult.
- While the Joint Matriculation Board no longer exists, the statutory requirements in terms of the old Senior Certificate (SC) are still in place until 2014, when the SC is finally fully phased out. The current Matriculation Board (MB) does not have a formal policy regarding RPL, but the universities usually approach the MB for an exemption certificate once the student has completed a foundation or bridging programme and wishes to access a degree programme. Such a student cannot enter a degree programme directly. The MB exemption certificate is granted based on an assessment of the progress of the student so far and thus removes the need to have completed an SC for entry to degree

---

<sup>14</sup> Discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 of the current report

programmes. However, the SC is a legal impediment only for undergraduate studies. In postgraduate studies decisions are often made based on the discretion of the faculty/supervisor.

#### *Issues in relation to the college sector*

- One submission advised redeveloping and invigorating the 'N' courses, including developing curriculum dialogue with the higher education sector.
- "Develop the college sector as a vibrant alternative to higher education."
- "RPL was historically a peripheral activity in FET colleges (though this may be changing due to the renewed focus on the 'N' courses and trade tests). As such, it was not well resourced and supported. In FET institutions RPL policy is often a matter of compliance rather than implementation, as such a policy is required by the SETAs in order for the college to be accredited. In addition, the lack of effective marketing, coupled with the challenges in the maintenance of quality practice and assessment, results in a poor perception of the quality of the RPL candidate from industry."
- There is currently very limited training in RPL methodology and practice at FET institutions other than for occupationally specific assessor training. Some practitioners themselves have varying conceptions of what RPL is and this is often limited to their context. In addition, the pressure from their institutions for increased throughput may result in substandard RPL assessment practices, particularly in trade tests at the "weaker" colleges.

#### *Issues in the workplace*

- "[There is] no provision for RPL in specific sectors of industry based on *sector scarce and critical skills*."
- A submission put forward the suggestion of establishing sector-specific qualifications frameworks, which could facilitate inter alia RPL implementation, which in turn could be used as a diagnostic tool to identify further training needs.

#### *Issues for the national implementation strategy*

- "There needs to be a public re-education programme about what RPL can and cannot do, including clarification of different types of RPL."
- "[There needs to be] advocacy and education around the holistic value of RPL, and existing policies and practices."
- "Encourage recognition agreements between particular higher education institutions and particular colleges."
- Develop a framework/guide/manual/template for the portfolio of evidence, to assist in the assessment of RPL candidates.
- There needs to be funding to train RPL assessors, and funding to facilitate RPL processes within institutions.

- Improve articulation arrangements between sector-based institutions and re-align SETA-accredited offerings to facilitate articulation.
- There must be a review of and changes to quality assurance systems for RPL.
- “Balance the national strategy/regulation with facilitating best practice.”
- In order to *professionalise* the sector, career pathways for RPL practitioners need to be developed. This needs to be linked to continuing professional development and concomitant resourcing and recognition. Practitioners should be able to progress, to become advisors and RPL moderators. There is also a “pedagogy” that underpins effective RPL practice. Practitioners should know this and understand that RPL is broader than simply “check box ticking”. This needs to be encouraged and developed in training and development initiatives.
- “Review current RPL policies, processes and structures in relation to accreditation, design and implementation, in order to achieve the following:
  - A participatory accreditation, design strategy and structure that take into consideration the barriers of literacy, language and access to services and resources; and
  - An RPL discourse and practice that is framed in a manner that does not restrict it to accreditation but emphasises broader, holistic social inclusion and active participation in all facets of life.”
- “[There need to be] concerted efforts to design social programmes that address the systemic and structural barriers that restrict or impede effective community participation in the RPL discourse.”
- “RPL discourse and practices must permeate all public organisation and institutions, including civil society organisations and state institutions.”
- “[There need to be] recognition and accreditation of RPL within worker education.”

## 3.2 Research into RPL practices in SETAs

The RPL MTT acknowledges SAQA’s contribution to this activity, as SAQA funded a part-time researcher to undertake the review of SETA RPL practices. This section provides a summary of the research process and findings.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.2.1 RPL policy and its implementation

#### 3.2.1.1 RPL policy

Each SETA should have an RPL policy, as this forms part of the criteria for accreditation as an ETQA (SAQA 2001: 31). The question then becomes: To what extent has implementation of

---

<sup>15</sup> Based on the report submitted by researcher Dr B Malgas (2012)

that RPL policy been carried out? And what kinds of challenges have been experienced? The research into RPL practices in SETAs showed the following trends in this regard:

- SETAs implemented an RPL policy that is based on SAQA's RPL policy of 2002. As expected, their understanding of RPL reflects RPL mainly as an assessment practice as indicated in the 2002 RPL policy.
- RPL policies are organised in three ways: (i) as part of the assessment policy (six SETAs); (ii) as stand-alone policies (14 SETAs); and (iii) delegated to Quality Assurance Partners (QAPs) in the case of FASSET (indicated in the report as not having an RPL policy).
- Four SETAs do not include RPL policy implementation as part of their accreditation criteria.
- The main types of RPL assessment that are being used include portfolio of evidence assessments, on-the-job observations and practical assessments.

### **3.2.1.2 Status of RPL implementation**

The responses of the SETAs indicated variations in the status of implementation. A total of 16 SETAs indicated that they had implemented RPL in their sector.<sup>16</sup> Of these, at least eight SETAs are involved in researching RPL practices.

There are two trends evident in the data:

- There is a high concentration of RPL implementation in sectors where there have been legislative changes and these changes have resulted in practitioners being required to have a particular skills programme (part qualification) or a qualification in order to be recognised as a practitioner in their respective fields (Bank SETA and INSETA regarding FAIS, and Services SETA regarding estate agents).
- SETAs have been driven by the need for the development of artisans within their particular sectors.

### **3.2.1.3 Number of qualifications and unit standards awarded through RPL**

The SETAs reported a total of 53,843 candidates that had been awarded either part qualifications or qualifications through RPL. It is expected that the above two trends pertaining to implementation of RPL are reflected to a certain extent in the number of candidates involved in RPL practices. Although INSETA and the Bank SETA reported a combined candidate number of 38,586 candidates, the Services SETA reported only 948 candidates, which is very low when compared to research done in this sector. CETA reported a total of 5,932 candidates and AgriSETA a total of 1,183; CHIETA a total of 2,376;

---

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the data obtained directly from the SETAs do not correspond with the data presented by Tloubata et al. (2012) in their analysis of RPL achievements on the NLRD – the data obtained from the SETAs are much higher than what are recorded on the NLRD. There could be a number of reasons for this, including that the periods for which the data are relevant do not correspond (we collected data including 2012, while the NLRD data go to 2010), or that not all RPL achievements have been loaded onto the NLRD.

HW SETA 1,200; and merSETA 1,406 candidates. The other SETAS provided an RPL service to a small number of candidates.

There are three trends evident in the data:

1. The majority of candidates followed an RPL process measuring knowledge and skills against NQF Levels 4 and 5 part qualifications and qualifications.
2. A maximum number of 3,848 candidates participated in RPL on NQF Levels 1 and 2 (a maximum number is provided as some SETAS did not specify a particular level but indicated NQF Levels 1–4).
3. The statistical reporting taking place does not meet the requirements (of SAQA's RPL policy of 2002) for recording of data.

#### **3.2.1.4 Financial support to RPL processes**

A total of 16 SETAS did provide financial support for RPL practices.

It was reported that within the five-year period between 2008 and 2012, a total of R141,855,894 had been allocated for RPL. The Bank SETA with R7,570,226 (2010–12); INSETA with R4,713,082 (period not indicated); Services SETA with R40,467,000 (period not indicated); merSETA with R20,432,500; and CETA with a total of R50,000,000 (period not indicated) are the SETAS that allocated the largest amounts to RPL practices.

Table 1 sets out the actual amounts as provided by the SETAs.

In terms of financial support to RPL, the trends are as follows:

- SETAS that responded to legislative requirements (FAIS and estate agents) and artisan development (merSETA and CETA) made finances available to support RPL processes.
- In sectors where there was no legislative compliance required or no national drive towards RPL, SETAs implemented RPL on a small scale with corresponding financial support.

**Table 1: SETA financial support to RPL processes**

Name of SETA	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total RPL budget allocation
AgriSETA	-	-	-	-	-	R3,000,000 <sup>1</sup>
Bank SETA	-	-	R828,210	R2,242,016	R4,500,000	R7,570,226
CATHSSETA	-	-	R387,943	-	R112,057	R450,000
CETA	-	-	-	-	-	R50,000,000 <sup>2</sup>
CHIETA	-	-	-	-	R500,000	R500,000
ETDP SETA	-	-	R270,000	-	R230,000	R500,000
EWSETA	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
FASSET	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
FoodBevSETA	-	-	-	-	-	Not specified
FPM	-	R1,950,000	-	R50,000	-	R2,000,000
HW SETA	R2,500,000	-	-	-	-	R2,500,000
INSETA	-	-	-	-	-	R4,713,082 <sup>1</sup>
LGSETA	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
merSETA	-	-	R20,432,500	-	-	R20,432,500
MICT	-	-	-	-	-	Nil
MQA	R250,000	R200,000	-	R10,000	R990,000	R1,450,000
PSETA	-	-	-	R626,667	-	R626,666 <sup>1</sup>
SASSETA <sup>3</sup>	-	-	-	-	-	R966,720 <sup>1</sup>
Services SETA	-	-	-	-	-	R40,467,000 <sup>1</sup>
TETA	R1,500,000	-	R1,000,000	-	R1,400,000	R3,900,000
W&RSETA	-	-	-	R2,779,700	-	R2,779,700
<b>Total</b>						<b>R141,855,894</b>

**Notes:**

1 The amounts indicated do not reflect years of budget as it is not available at this time.

2 This amount was for the 2003 financial year and was included as a matter of record.

3 There is outstanding information from SASSETA.

**3.2.1.5 Systemic problems and obstacles in RPL implementation**

The investigation into RPL practices in SETAS highlighted several important areas that pose a challenge to successful RPL implementation and taking RPL to scale in the future. The areas that pose a challenge are coded in terms of quality, learner support, systemic approach, advocacy, and sustainability, and are discussed below.

**Quality**

The research findings suggested that the low quality of training provided by FET institutions does not support RPL processes. SETAs reported that there are no standard operating procedures to guide assessors and moderators through the RPL process. In the absence of contextualised tools for each sector, providers find it difficult to conduct and understand the



implementation procedures of RPL. This lack of guiding procedures is manifested in weak monitoring procedures of RPL processes. These weaknesses in the system emphasise the need for the establishment of RPL centres per sector.

### *Learner support*

Closely related to the lack of provider quality, SETAs indicated that there are not enough experienced staff to perform RPL successfully. Assessors and moderators do not have the required confidence to guide and support candidates through the RPL process up to completion. One of the reasons indicated was the language difference between the workplace and academia. There is a lack of capacity to translate workplace knowledge into academic knowledge and make academic knowledge accessible to candidates not accustomed to academic language.

### *Systemic approach*

One of the important indicators of success is the extent to which a system could develop coherence among its elements. SETAs reported that (i) some providers implement RPL by developing their own separate systems and therefore not following national RPL policy and policies prescribed by the SETAs; and (ii) some professional bodies (FASSET sector) do not accept an RPL model outside of a narrowly defined assessment process, ignoring other important aspects that are part of the RPL process.

Apart from systemic challenges in terms of meeting requirements set by the SETAs, RPL practices in terms of the trades provide some challenges as well. In line with the Manpower Training Act (No. 56 of 1981), the system differentiates between Section 13 and Section 28 candidates to write a trade test. Section 13 candidates enter into a formal apprenticeship contract with an employer, attend formalised institutional training, work as apprentices in a workplace, and are coached by an experienced staff member, after which candidates write a trade test. Section 28 candidates have workplace experience deemed to be equal to that of an apprentice, and are allowed to take the trade test without being required to undertake formalised training. Section 13 and Section 28 trade tests are identical, with the fundamental difference being that candidates for the former sign a contract and do formalised training, while candidate for the latter do not. The problem identified is that industry does not trust Section 28 candidates, being of the opinion that Section 28 candidates do not have *foundational* knowledge of the trade and would not be in a position to apply their 'limited knowledge' in challenging situations.

### *Advocacy*

A system cannot operate optimally without in some way creating a common language and understanding of the system. The SETAs reported major misunderstandings in their sectors with regard to RPL. Candidates have high but unrealistic expectations of RPL and see it as a 'quick fix' for their educational aspirations. Some industries hesitate to embark on RPL

processes as RPL has received a bad reputation, which is based on (i) candidate experiences; (ii) workplace experiences; and (iii) complexity of the process. Sometimes workplaces discriminate against staff who are qualified through RPL. The core problem indicated is a lack of communication to providers and workplaces, and a lack of clear information on RPL, including a realistic sense of what it can and cannot do for candidates.

### ***Sustainability***

Sustainability is one of the core elements of a system. SETAs reported that from a provider perspective RPL is a costly exercise, demanding adequate staffing, work hours and other resources to support candidates. Implementation of RPL in the workplace is seen as too cumbersome a process and too expensive for the employer (Malgas 2012: 36).

## **3.2.2 Recommendations by SETA ETQAs for future RPL implementation**

The research required SETAs to provide recommendations on RPL implementation strategy and action plans for the immediate future, and the medium and long terms. The SETA recommendations are summarised below.

### **3.2.2.1 Recommendations for the immediate future**

The main recommendations for immediate implementation were:

1. There is a need for advocacy and to create awareness of RPL, including learners, workers and workplaces. RPL must be “declared” on a national platform.
2. There is a need for building RPL capacity at all levels of the system.
3. There must be a strategy to record and report on learners coming through the RPL system.
4. RPL should be cost effective for learners.
5. Guidelines should be developed for setting up, accrediting and running RPL centres.
6. RPL practices in general, but learner support in particular, should be quality assured and monitored.
7. RPL methods and models need to be developed.

### **3.2.2.2 Recommendations for the medium term**

There is currently no standard approach to RPL and there is a need to set these at national level. A revised national policy and implementation process should be developed in order to create a coherent and synergised system of implementation.

The SETAs made the following suggestions:

1. Establish RPL centres.

2. Introduce the practice of RPL in FET colleges, separating theory from practical. Prioritise rural areas in this regard.
3. Simplify the approach to RPL. There is a need to develop an RPL framework for each sector (e.g. artisans), including a unified model for RPL funding and administration.
4. Make employers aware that they need to release workers to do training. Once the workers are qualified, they will have to be paid more.
5. RPL in terms of occupationally directed learning (NQF Levels 2–4) should be more naturally occurring – equivalent to methodology used for awarding of honorary doctorates, especially for workers with over 20 years’ experience. The compilation of portfolios, interviews, assignments and the like must be encouraged; that is, a move away from formal assessments.
6. Conduct research to provide clear guidance for RPL. There is no clear, overarching or common understanding within RPL of what is acceptable and what is not.
7. Introduce capacity building of assessors and moderators, including capacity in designing RPL assessment instruments.
8. Emphasise mainstreaming RPL.
9. Audit current practices to determine the extent and depth of RPL delivery within the various constituencies. In particular, appropriate assessment instruments and tools are critical, to ensure the credibility of the assessments and the integrity of the system.

### 3.2.2.3 Recommendations for the long term

The SETAs made the following suggestions:

1. Recognise RPL as an equivalent means to any pathway of learning; in other words, there needs to be a change in the perception and attitudes of people towards RPL.
2. Evaluate RPL processes, and conduct an impact analysis against recorded numbers, processes and practices.
3. Develop the RPL system in a sustained manner, including capacity building for RPL advisors and other staff involved in RPL practices, and infrastructure.
4. Develop and maintain tracer studies to monitor the development of RPL and to make it possible to make recommendations ensuring the strengthening of RPL in all sectors.

## 3.3 Key issues

The following is a summary of the key issues arising from the consultations with key national stakeholders and the commissioned research into SETA RPL practices.

### *Narrow vs broader conceptions of the purposes of RPL*

Some reference has been made to the need to recognise that RPL is not only about a narrow recognition of particular skills, nor is it only about redress in a formalistic sense. It is also a

pedagogical practice and requires practitioners and the system to recognise other knowledge forms and systems.

### *Regulatory systems and communities of practice*

The current regulatory and quality assurance framework is not facilitating the implementation of RPL, especially not in terms of the broader conceptualisation referred to above. A more systematic approach to capacity development across the education and training system is required, through the development of communities of practice and trust. In particular, capacity within the FET and workplace sub-systems needs to be developed. Advocacy to support national RPL implementation is critical. The establishment of regional RPL centres or hubs have been recognised as an important aspect of the emerging system.

### *Broadening the research base and agenda*

Much of the documented research in South Africa relates to higher education, and this needs to be broadened to include different sectors, contexts and knowledge bases. Related to this is ensuring that data collection, capturing and dissemination processes are improved within the system.

## Chapter 4: Resourcing and funding RPL

This chapter focuses in some detail on issues relating to the funding and resourcing of RPL – issues already touched on, albeit briefly, in Chapter 2.

RPL is relatively expensive, even if ideally it should be less expensive than administering training. In industrialised countries, RPL has tended to incur costs for the learner, but this may not be feasible in many developing countries. On the other hand, there is some evidence that a nominal charge may help adult learners value the process and may motivate them to see the process through to completion. Examples of good practice have shown how costs for learners can be reduced, including through streamlining processes, using online support and conducting workshops to help applicants through the process (Sims 2010).

Although RPL undoubtedly has many benefits, the cost can be a barrier to its promotion, in particular to meeting the learning needs of the disadvantaged. Developing a sustainable funding mechanism is thus key to establishing an RPL system. To make RPL available on a broader scale and accessible to more learners, it is important that funding come from diversified sources.

In this context, to quote the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2012: 6), it is often necessary to do the following:

- Provide sufficient financial resources to build the basic infrastructure of the RPL system.
- Develop sustainable, cost-sharing mechanisms involving multi-stakeholder partnerships, i.e. public, private, the community, and individual learners. Public funds and private contributions to education institutions, as well as training levies from enterprises, should also be used to fund the implementation of RPL.
- Make special provision for access to RPL arrangements at a reduced rate, or free of charge, for vulnerable groups and individuals.
- Conduct cost–benefit analyses to develop evidence on the benefits of RPL for individuals, enterprises, education institutions and society as a whole.

South Africa has a clearly formulated set of policies and principles for RPL that forms part of its development of an NQF and which, among other things, is designed to open second chance opportunities for those who were refused access to education and training in the past.

Section 1.4 (below) considers how RPL has been funded in different contexts and sectors in South Africa. In order to design a viable funding mechanism, some knowledge of the

*preferred* model to be implemented in South Africa is necessary. However, in the absence of such information, the current report presents a set of alternatives. Key to such arrangements is the nature of potential partnerships; for example, between government and other stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, and education institutions. Section 4.2 provides a brief review of relevant RPL partnerships in the international literature. Section 4.3 examines the role of ‘assessment centres’ for RPL, given that this might be a feature of a future South African RPL system and will therefore have considerable implications for funding. Section 4.4 looks at the experience of assessment centres in the light of the possibility that South Africa may be considering the establishment of a national RPL centre – or an RPL institute. Finally, Section 4.5 considers some options for RPL funding models in South Africa.

## **4.1 Funding approaches to RPL in South Africa**

Currently, there is no formal, systemic funding system for RPL in South Africa. In most cases, institutions (e.g. universities and SETAs) fund their own RPL activities, including the development of procedures and infrastructure as needed (Blom et al. 2007).

In some cases, individual RPL candidates are expected to pay for RPL services, but in other cases the cost is carried by an employer or through sponsorships. There is no standard cost structure, as the contexts within which RPL is undertaken may be vastly different.

In the national RPL policy (SAQA 2002), the broad guideline is as follows:

RPL services and assessment should not cost more than a full-time face-to-face programme, particularly if such services are integrated into the existing infrastructure. The cost of developing a system and the necessary capacity to support the system, is not unlike the costs involved in the development of a new learning programme. This means that the initial start-up costs may be relatively high, but increasingly, with learners entering such a programme, the costs are reduced and spread over a period of time...In principle, RPL should be more cost-effective for candidates, employers and employees by reducing the cost of training in terms of those parts of the qualification for which the candidate already meets the requirements. The cost of developing RPL systems and capacity must be seen as an investment in the development of a credible lifelong learning system in South Africa. (SAQA 2002: 8)

A limited number of assessment centres, which focus purely on RPL, exist. These centres are ad hoc and were established through local initiatives due to local needs. A small number of private initiatives, focusing on the corporate market, have also emerged (Blom et al. 2007).

In South Africa there are a few such examples of successful RPL initiatives. One such example is the Free State Higher Education Consortium (FSHEC). This regional RPL project was funded by donor contributions and partner-institution (all public higher education institutions) membership fees, with no funding from the state. Its aim was to offer a centralised RPL service to its higher education institution partners, in order to widen the participation of learners wanting to enter higher education, while ensuring effectiveness, efficiency and quality. The project charged RPL candidates a small administrative fee (where possible) to cover some of the operational costs.

Another successful RPL initiative has been undertaken by the South African Insurance sector. This initiative is implemented by a public higher education institution and funded by employers.

The key funding challenge for the implementation of a policy dealing with RPL is the *sustainability* of such a system.

In South Africa, limited capacity means that the current education and training system is struggling to find a solution to the large-scale nature of the problems of access and recognition. Most of those who require these opportunities do not have the resources to pay for them, and so bursaries and massive state funding would be needed to make them possible. Over and above these identified risks are psychological barriers, as elsewhere.

Education and certification providers in particular do not necessarily properly understand precisely what the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (as reflected in RPL) entails and especially the procedures associated with it. There is an apparent need for simplification. The problem is that RPL candidates may be regarded as deficient if too much attention is paid to what they are unable to do rather than identifying knowledge gaps and recognising what they do indeed 'have'.

The main target audience of RPL programmes consists of those who were excluded from access to education and training opportunities under apartheid and those whose knowledge and skills were developed experientially and through political struggle but not recognised in the formal system. The RPL policy is also aimed at different segments of the labour market; for example, teachers, nurses, and construction workers who were excluded from professional and technical qualification in the past and who now require these qualifications to be employed and registered. In addition, South Africa is considering strategies to award 'advanced standing' qualifications, or admit people to extended curricula, so as to prevent renewed mistreatment of those who have already suffered injustice. This might affect underskilled adults such as nurses or teachers. And a natural target for action of course comprises all persons who do not satisfy the pre-conditions for entering the formal system of education and training.

In principle all education and training institutions are meant to establish programmes and procedures for RPL. In practice, a limited number of higher education institutions and private providers have done so. Earlier, reference was made to the FSHEC and the insurance sector. In addition, since 2002, the merSETA has focused on small and medium-sized enterprises, given their all too familiar difficulties with regard to human capital development in general and the recognition of learning outcomes in particular.

## 4.2 Partnerships

In many areas of education and training, partnerships provide for better access and more rapid development of systems. This applies especially to RPL, in which prospective learners should perceive self-evident links between learning and the labour market, for example, or between certification and recruitment. As regards RPL, certain partnerships also appear to be taking shape for the same theoretical reasons.

In Switzerland, for example, a partnership exists between the OFFT,<sup>17</sup> the cantons (local government), and the world of work. The confederation provides a certain level of quality assurance, while the involvement of the cantons means that prospective candidates are offered entry to the system, and the professional associations award qualifications and endorse their value.

In the Czech Republic, there is a scheme for getting the stakeholders in education and in the labour market to cooperate, so as to link labour market needs to the qualifications awarded by the education and training system.

In The Netherlands, there is a history of strong collaboration between government and stakeholders, particularly employers and trade unions. A budget of €10 million has been requested in that country to strengthen cooperation between secondary education, the regions, employers and municipalities (Werquin 2010).

In Ireland, the recognition of RPL outcomes is felt to call for collaboration between the government, education and the regions, to avoid pitfalls identified, particularly in terms of the weakness of a system that is too fragmented and nobody is familiar with or uses.

In Norway, there is strong cooperation between social partners, the Ministry of Education, and education institutions. It is as a result of this that RPL outcomes are enshrined in legislation.

---

<sup>17</sup> The acronym for “Office fédéral de la formation professionnelle et de la technologie” – federal office for professional education and technology.



In Mexico, financial partnerships have been formed between official institutions and enterprises in order to cover the costs of recognition. In Chile, no less than three ministries are involved in the equivalent of their RPL programme (Werquin 2010).

SAQA (2002) highlighted two different types of regional arrangements in an analysis of the North American models of RPL provisioning. The one, Vermont State College (VSC) system in the USA, is an example of excellent regional institutional collaboration. The other, the PLA Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia in Canada, is a community-based, semi-independent RPL centre. The latter is more common.

The VSC is a partnership between 15 community colleges in the state of Vermont. The VSC RPL service is aimed at learners who do not fulfil the conventional college entry requirements, or who have learning from experience for which they wish to gain credit towards a formal college qualification (SAQA 2002).

The PLA Centre in Halifax offers RPL services to individuals and organisations that have a range of development needs – from education and training, to facing unemployment or pursuing career advancement (SAQA 2002). The PLA Centre is a joint project involving five Halifax universities, the provincial community college system, representatives from community groups, voluntary organisations, labour, the private sector and government.

Table 2 summarises some of the government partners in a range of countries.

**Table 2: Government and partners in RPL – sample of country experiences**

<b>Country</b>	<b>National government partners</b>
Czech Republic	Employers, education institutions
Ireland	Education institutions, regional administrations
Mexico	Employers
Norway	Employers, trade unions, education institutions
South Africa	Employers, higher education institutions, some private providers
Switzerland	Cantons (local government), employers
The Netherlands	Employers, trade unions, education institutions, local government

The roles of the partners vary. In some countries, employers play both funding and implementation roles, while in others their role may be restricted to funding. In some countries, there are both public and private providers for RPL. Private providers may be funded by the government, by government and employers, or through a combination of government/employer funding and student fees.

### 4.3 Assessment centres

One of the key issues in the development of the RPL infrastructure is whether there should be a centralised assessment centre. It is evident in the literature that too many practical restrictions on the places and methods of assessment may deter the least motivated candidates. Importantly, the issues of cost and permanence should not be overlooked. If the recognition system is self-sufficient, it is probably more expensive to run than if it is based on existing organisational arrangements and able, where necessary, to share costs with learning centres. These issues all affect permanence, as a self-sufficient system relies on no outside agency but may encounter financial difficulties and disappear, whereas one anchored in a shared infrastructure is less costly but may be subject to the goodwill of the owner of the premises, which may also threaten its permanence.

Whatever the circumstances, some countries let candidates choose freely where they will be assessed. Others do not and firmly specify the place concerned, as happens in The Netherlands, for example.

The difficulty stems from the fact that most countries, especially developing nations, face organisational problems because of the relative scarcity of infrastructure and related concerns such as ease of access and equity. Besides, RPL assessment centres cannot necessarily be used interchangeably across all disciplines, and everything may depend on the field in which learning outcomes are assessed. In Greece and Hungary, recognition is very often used for modern languages, so assessment quite naturally occurs in language schools (Werquin 2012).

In Slovenia, the entire system is based on the NVQ, which calls for appropriate tools and materials for assessing (say) a builder. The National Examination Centre regulates assessment and recognition procedures. There are 73 regional assessment centres, which make use of existing facilities (Werquin 2012).

In Australia, there are many RPL assessment possibilities, including the regional training organisations, private agencies, the universities, other tertiary institutions, the professional associations, private training providers, and national and international organisations.

Few countries have dedicated RPL assessment centres. One that does is The Netherlands, with 42 such centres in secondary education; 12 in the agricultural sector; and 13 in the higher education sector. There are also around 30 centres attached to various foundations or the private sector. In Belgium, there are dedicated RPL centres – accredited assessment agencies – but only for vocational qualifications. A Recognition Agency also awards qualifications on the recommendation of the assessment agencies.

In Norway, the counties receive block grants to organise the system for RPL and, in particular, to open assessment centres. There are 121 in the entire country. In a cost-sharing strategy, most are located in schools that provide upper secondary education.

Chile has 45 accredited RPL assessment centres, which are all private. In Switzerland, the cantons and vocational sectors organise RPL assessment, as in the case of qualifications in the formal system. In Ireland, the formal system of education and training assumes responsibility for RPL assessment. In Iceland, schools providing upper secondary education also take in RPL candidates.

Denmark also does not have independent RPL assessment centres; each education and training institution organises RPL assessment when it is an integral part of a programme offered on its premises.

Mexico has no dedicated RPL assessment centres. However, it has more than 400 sites organising adult learning assessment.

Canada has no national RPL assessment centres. However, post-secondary education institutions are able to offer this service.

In some sectors in South Africa – for example, in construction and insurance – RPL advice and assessment centres have been established to facilitate RPL projects related to new industry norms and standards.

In summary, relatively few countries have dedicated, centralised RPL assessment centres. Most countries appear to prefer a decentralised model in partnership with education institutions and other training organisations, or with regional and local government.

#### **4.4 Review of RPL funding**

This section provides a brief review of RPL funding across a small set of countries, analysing in particular issues such as fees, registration costs and infrastructure funding.

Singh (2011b) suggests that funding for RPL can be satisfied either by institutional or *supply*-driven financing measures – that is, funds flow directly to the institution from the financier or sponsor (e.g. government or employers); or through *demand*-driven financing methods – where funds flow directly to the learner (e.g. through the issuance of vouchers) and from the learner to institutions providing RPL services. This latter method is supposed to promote a “market for training”.

An important (and obvious) question in the search for funding solutions for RPL is: Who pays? According to Singh (2011a), there are various possibilities (and combinations) in this regard:

- Individuals: participants/candidates or 'customers';
- Private sector employers;
- Trade unions;
- Education institutions;
- Donors, both local and foreign; and
- Government.

In this context, Singh (2011a) identifies three models: (i) market-led; (ii) state-led; and (iii) social partnerships.

In the market-led model, employers play a central role in providing RPL for their employees. Some weaknesses of this model include underinvestment; inequality in the distribution of provision; and low quality of provision.

According to Singh (2011a), in the state-led model, the state can rely on special education taxes, which are raised either for education in general or for lifelong learning programmes. The state can then set aside a separate budget for RPL.

Singh (2011a) proposes two models of her own. In a demand-side version, the state could provide vouchers to individuals who can then choose between education institutions and programmes. The effectiveness of such a voucher system depends, inter alia, on a well-developed information system.

The second model discussed by Singh (2011a) refers to the credit bank system, such as in South Korea, which allows individuals to accumulate credits from diverse non-formal education institutions towards an associate or bachelor degree. The focus here is on giving individuals more choice, from different institutions and diverse learning programmes (Singh (2011a).

In Australia, there has been a history of variability in the amount of funding provided for RPL. Funding arrangements for RPL have differed between states, and within states, across provider types and programmes. In addition, national funding accountability arrangements for RPL have given more credit for an enrolment in the training programme than for RPL. This uneven funding arrangement may have influenced the take up and perceived parity of esteem of RPL as a component in the training pathway to the same qualification. More recently, however, there has been a common trend towards funding RPL at the same rate as for equivalent training programmes.

Registration or entrance fees represent the share of the costs that is borne by candidates. In Australia, the assessment fee is calculated in accordance with one of the following three methods: a flat rate, a percentage of the total cost of the recognition procedure (around 50%), or a nominal hourly rate. In general, these costs are assumed by the government, with learners covering solely indirect costs such as transport, photocopies and communication.

In many countries candidates bear a share of the costs through registration fees. However, in Ireland, where there are few candidates, the institution covers the fees. In Slovenia, the registration fees of the unemployed are borne by the Public Employment Service, to which employers contribute. In the Czech Republic, the registration fees paid by learners for the theoretical part of the assessment are lower than those for the practical part, reflecting the extra costs involved in arranging for the real-life assessment of knowledge, skills and competences. In Mexico, registration fees are calculated exactly to cover the costs of the system, although this appears not to apply to registration fees for RPL into bachelor degree qualifications.

In Norway, the counties charge various fees, depending on whether it is the academic or the vocational sector that is involved. In tertiary education, all costs are covered by the university budget. In Hungary, there is no general payable assessment system but there are fees in separate segments of adult training. In Denmark, fees depend on the type of assessment; for basic skills, there are no fees. General adult learning is paid for with funding on the basis of the time involved. Finally, in tertiary education in Denmark, there are registration fees but also with government subsidies to offset them.

In Mexico there are no costs in primary education but there are significant costs at other levels.

In Austria, there is no special funding for RPL. Various stakeholders – including the chambers of commerce, the learning centres and the universities – contribute to funding. Registration fees depend on the time taken to organise the assessment (examinations) and financial support is possible from the Public Employment Service.

In Canada, in general assessment fees are borne by institutions. Other costs are divided between institutions and learners. In the country's Manitoba Province, institutions receive money to fund infrastructure. However, registration fees vary widely and may be non-existent or flat-rate amounts for each course. A quite common idea is that the registration fees for a procedure to recognise RPL outcomes should only be a percentage of those for the equivalent regular course.

Belgium (like South Africa) upholds the idea that RPL should never be more expensive than the corresponding training. Assessment fees for university education vary according to the

level of the degree. With regard to skills recognition via the experience certificate, funding comes from the European Social Fund, even though students pay for a practical test and cover some of the fees.

In Slovenia, the Ministry of Labour is the biggest source of RPL funding.

It is quite difficult to get a clear idea about the funding of systems for RPL and the budgets earmarked for them, as few countries possess detailed information. The Netherlands is one of the few countries with special government appropriation. For employees, the costs are shared between employers and the funds for education and development or the local authorities. In few cases do employees themselves contribute to the costs of RPL assessment. Registration fees vary from zero to a few hundred Euros. In the case of tertiary education, registration fees may be €1,000–€1,250 per participant. In secondary education, the costs and thus the registration fees are not as high. Moreover, they are often offset by the fact that candidates are enrolled as participants in traditional training programmes. In The Netherlands, employees may deduct a share of their individual costs for this recognition from their income tax. Employers also secure a tax relief when an employee embarks on a recognition procedure.

In Norway, employers have also paid for continuing training, and for recognition. While the basic state budget provides block grants for education in general, it also has to cover the costs of RPL.

In Chile, there are few operational RPL programmes and all are funded by the government. There is an ongoing debate about diversifying funding sources and drawing on the financial means of candidates, as well as on their enterprises if they are employed. Another idea is that costs could be geared to individual employee earnings.

Some countries have introduced forms of tax relief, so that funding is indirectly based on the state budget. This is the case in Australia. It is also true of Denmark but subject to certain conditions, such as labour market participation at a lower level of qualifications than that corresponding to upper secondary education.

It is interesting to ask whether there are relevant lessons from The Netherlands model, because the RPL model there has been extensively studied for its possible applicability to South Africa (see Bank SETA 2011, for instance). Some relevant features of the Dutch model are the following:

- Funding involves both government and stakeholders (employers, unions), with substantial resources committed by the former.
- Government provides resources for the national RPL assessment centre.

- Implementation of RPL takes place by a range of partners, including education institutions, companies and local government.

The Netherlands has established a *Kenniscentrum* – Knowledge Centre for the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). This centre collects and shares knowledge and good practices on accreditation of prior learning in the country. It stimulates the use of APL practices by developing a sustainable infrastructure for the application of APL practices in education and the labour market, in regions and sectors.

Table 3 provides a summary of the RPL funders in a selected sample of countries.

**Table 3: RPL funders – selected sample of countries**

Country	Entities responsible for funding
Australia	State governments, employers, learners
Austria	Government, employers, education institutions
Canada	Provincial governments, employers, education institutions
Chile	Government
Czech Republic	Government, learners
Mexico	Government, employers, learners
Norway and Denmark	Government, learners
The Netherlands	Government, employers, learners

## 4.5 Proposed funding models for South Africa

The issue of the cost to individuals and to organisations when implementing and establishing an RPL system is a contentious point across the literature, with mixed opinions and findings. Saving training hours, saving time away from work and saving fees are the oft-cited benefits of RPL for candidates and enterprises. For training providers, financial benefits are expressed as increased enrolments and potential for new markets.

However, much of the discourse around cost relates more to funding arrangements more broadly and who pays for the RPL assessment. Fees and charges to individuals are often cited as a reason for poor take up of RPL and are also prominent in access and equity debates.

There are at least three options for setting RPL fees and charges:

- On the basis of time spent by an assessor.
- On the basis of the amount of credit applied for.
- On the basis of the cost of enrolling in the relevant subjects.

A common thread in the literature is that the type of resourcing model and costing arrangements for RPL will influence its take up.

Some countries resource registered training organisations to undertake RPL either at the same rate as the training programme itself or at a rate less than the equivalent training hours. Some fund in an equivalent manner across programmes and provider types, while others fund differently across programmes and/or providers.

As with the resourcing of registered training organisations for RPL, the costs charged by the organisations to students for RPL also vary widely – from no cost, to what the market will bear as a full fee-for-service arrangement.

In some countries, the ‘shortfall’ between government-funded programmes and the ‘true cost’ of RPL is funded by the registered training organisations or the client.

#### **4.5.1 Funding options for South Africa**

This section considers three possible approaches to thinking about funding models for RPL implementation in South Africa.

##### **4.5.1.1 Model 1 – Wholly state-funded**

In this scenario the state will fund all infrastructure and activities relating to RPL outcomes, including the following:

- a) Infrastructure – e.g. a national RPL institute; and
- b) Subsidies to training providers – e.g. higher education institutions, private providers.

The subsidies will have to be included in a modified higher education funding formula. If a national RPL institute is agreed upon, funding from the National Skills Fund is an option that needs to be explored.

##### **4.5.1.2 Model 2 – State and employer funding**

In this model, firstly, the state could fund the following set of activities:

- a) Infrastructure – e.g. a national RPL institute; and
- b) Subsidies to higher education institutions and FET colleges for RPL assessment and training for the unemployed.

Secondly, employers through the SETAs would provide RPL funding for their respective employees, as already demonstrated in sectors such as insurance and manufacturing.



#### **4.5.1.3 Model 3 – State and employer funding with student fees**

This model is the same as Model 2 but with some level of fees set – e.g. for registration – for those wishing to embark on an RPL programme. This could also work in a variant of a system where the state is the only major funder.

#### **4.5.2 Role of donors**

Preliminary discussions indicate that some donors may be willing to make an investment in the South African RPL system, particularly around training of assessors and other implementers of the envisaged RPL system. In this regard, consideration should be given to discussions with countries that appear to have a relative degree of success in RPL. Some examples here include Australia, Canada, Denmark, Norway and the USA.

## **Chapter 5: International and local legislative and policy review**

This chapter focuses in some detail on legislative and policy issues relating to RPL.

Section 5.1 focuses on the case of France, where RPL is enshrined in legislation – one of the few countries in the world where this is the case. Section 5.2 considers South African legislation that refers to RPL, in order for this task team to consider whether RPL-focused legislation needs to be introduced in South Africa. Section 5.3 considers current policy-related processes that contain an RPL dimension or that may impact on RPL, including considering the work of a number of other Ministerial Task Teams.

### **5.1 International case study of RPL legislation: France**

Note that this section is a summary of Werquin (2012).

#### **5.1.1 Introduction**

Over the past two centuries, France has had a constant focus on adult learning, which led to the Validation of Experiential Learning (VAE) being established. France has for a long time been focusing on the vocational preparation of adults for the labour market. Werquin (OECD 2003) points to the Condorcet speech of 1992 as laying the foundation for this, as it emphasised the principle that for a worker to be and to remain productive, they have to be trained throughout life. Thus the initial focus was on preparing and organising the training and qualifications process for the management staff in charge of developing their trade industries. Companies also played a major role as they set up their own schools to upgrade the competences of their workers, with trade unions taking a particular interest in establishing centres where disabled workers and those injured at work could be reskilled in preparation for resuming an active work life.

Also in France there is the largely widespread belief that qualifications can be achieved in different ways, a distinctive feature of this being the belief that the pathways and methods used could be different, but the qualification must be the same. A qualification can be definitely linked to the learning content but not the pathway. What matters is what has been acquired – the knowledge, skills and attributes – as opposed to where they have been acquired.

France has had a national qualifications framework since the early 1970s; however, it was not a factor at the time VAE was introduced because it was not based on outcomes.

### 5.1.2 The French legislative system

For the purposes of this discussion, there are three relevant levels in the French legislative system:

- The law – this is the highest level, generally short and to the point and subject specific.
- The application decree – this provides the framework, e.g. roles of implementation.
- The decision, by-law-specific to a particular area or body.

The following are some of the specific laws that have been passed in France:

1. The law of 1984 on Validation of Occupational and Personal Learning Outcomes (VAPP85): This is for access into tertiary education through exemption of an academic prerequisite. This law remains active to date.
2. The Law of 1992 on Validation of Occupational Learning Outcomes (VAP): Eligible applicants were exempted from all kinds of formal learning and from all kinds of assessment with the exception of one test that they needed to take; if an applicant failed that test it meant they lost all the qualifications that had been validated. This law no longer applies.
3. The law of 2002 on Validation of Experiential Learning Outcomes (VAE): This stipulates that to claim eligibility, an applicant must have at least three years of experience relevant to the qualification they aim to achieve. This procedure allows for the awarding of the full qualification; and units validated are deemed current for five years, during which time an applicant can work towards the completion of all the necessary units for achieving the full qualification.

Parallel with the passing of these laws that addressed the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, France set in motion a system called *Bilan de Compétences* – which, loosely translated, means “taking stock of someone’s competencies”. This served as an individual appraisal as it does not involve assessment or the awarding of qualifications but rather is an individual reflection of one’s competence and occupational pathways.

Currently, only VAPP85 and VAE coexist as the two systems for individuals to get their prior learning validated.

### 5.1.3 The laws are preceded by collaborative preparatory work

Most of the laws outlined above were preceded by a National Inter-sectoral Agreement, in terms of which representative social partners agreed on specific aspects of the relationship between employers and employees.

Another belief that is widespread in France is that validation of prior learning does not rest solely within the Ministry of Education. Several ministries are in charge of delivering qualifications; for example, ministries of agriculture, defence and labour. In total, the VAE was signed by 16 ministers and the prime minister. This makes the approach in VAE systematically inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial. This also means the standards that are used in the assessment process are provided by the relevant stakeholders to the targeted qualification, which may not necessarily rest in the Ministry of Education. The implication of having so many stakeholders is that it creates a sense of ownership that is widely shared and creates an atmosphere that is conducive to validation of prior learning.

It is important to note that there is usually some marginal amendment to the legislation required by the various ministries, and this might mean the process takes longer. All ministries want to remain in charge of whatever directly falls under their authority and field of expertise and, as such, design their own implementation strategy. The conditions under which those tasks are to be undertaken are not described in the law but are rather provided in additional texts, as decrees making allowance for a degree of flexibility in the implementation. It is worth noting that the French laws have been developed to serve specific purposes and it made sense in their case to have co-existing laws so as to cater to the specific needs as they arose.

#### **5.1.4 Number of participants**

The number of VAE applicants per year in France is relatively high by European standards. The proportion of eligible applicants that proceeded to the assessment stage of the validation process seemed to remain on average at about 70% (between 2005 and 2008). 'Eligibility' in this case refers to those applicants with at least three years of experience in a particular field; however, reaching the assessment stage requires more than passing the eligibility test, and it is a very demanding process for adults who have other responsibilities.

On a different level of analysis, the numbers show that the Ministry of Education remains the main user of VAE, followed by the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Higher Education. These four ministries constitute the bulk of the participation figures.

One final point to note is that the number of learners assessed in 2008, for example, does not match at all with the number of qualifications awarded every year in the initial education and training system. What makes sense, though, is to compare the number of qualifications awarded in the VAE system and the number of qualifications awarded in the adult learning system, where the two are on a par.

### 5.1.5 Funding and costs

The funding for VAE is twofold:

- The participation fee for any applicant and how much it costs the system and the organisation.
- The funding framework on how VAE can be resourced.

The law in France does not say anything in terms of the individual cost or the cost to organisations. However, the law of 2002 clearly shows that the funding for VAE should come from the previous legal arrangement for funding adult learning and adult vocational training, typically in the lifelong funding framework.

The cost to individuals cannot be provided in great detail as it varies per individual. However, the costs need to cover the following:

- Registration fees.
- The guidance and support process.

The point about guidance and support is crucial, because evidence suggests that applicants who are properly guided and attended during the preparation process have a much better success rate at the assessment, and benefit more from their new qualification in the labour market (Recotillet and Werquin 2009).

The decree of December 2002 clearly states that workers have a right to 24 hours of paid leave for VAE. In general, preparation time, assessment time and registration fees can be covered by different external funding according to the status of the applicant. Unemployed people can sometimes source funding from the Public Employment Service.

Companies bear the costs for assessing individuals (assessors, paperwork etc.) as well as the cost of further refining and review of standards corresponding to the target group. The Ministry of Labour is the key player in the VAE and, as such, plays a key role in allocating funds to the regional offices and other ministries to deliver qualifications. The Ministry of Labour also sponsors enterprises and other qualification providers.

The legislation is also quite clear that in the case of workers dedicated to participating in a VAE committee (as there is no remuneration for them), the costs they incur can be covered by the Accredited Fund Collecting and Distributing Agencies jointly run by employers and unions. These agencies collect money that can be used for their employees.

### 5.1.6 Options for South Africa

Werquin (2012) is of the opinion that the following must be considered for the way forward in South Africa:

1. New RPL legislation should possibly be introduced, or perhaps there should be a revision of current law – the aim being to create a law that caters for people’s needs so that people can participate. Policy can be fairly general and not rigid; for example, if legislation on RPL is tied to legislation on the NQF it may well be that some objectives are out of reach for participants because of complexity or because the legislation does not make provision for practical arrangements.
2. There needs to be greater societal awareness, leading to recognition of the credits or qualifications awarded. Involving other, end users at the beginning facilitates acceptance of the qualification that comes through RPL, while also communicating to the world at large that the qualifications are valued. The currency of the qualification is highly dependent on how well it is known by many people, especially employers.
3. In choosing the system to be adopted, clear objectives, for access or full qualification, need to be set out. A useful initial step would be to clarify, with great precision, what applicants may gain from participating in the RPL process. The legislative material must be carefully designed so that the governance of the system does not become difficult. In addition, there is a need to consider how this will cater for groups with special needs – such as the unemployed – and how it will accommodate gender balances and equity issues.
4. There must be involvement of many stakeholders in the preparatory work, rather than confining the preliminary discussions to the education sector. It is unlikely that one actor can cover all the aspects that need covering. Introducing a set of guidelines to facilitate the work of RPL does not seem to work either, as the guidelines are not legislation. This is also an issue of ethics and credibility as one cannot be both player and referee; an actor cannot be involved simultaneously in designing the system and using it.
5. Professional development must be organised for the staff of all the providers. Furthermore, it is important to organise communication of information, advice and guidance so that it reaches everyone and meets the needs and expectations of all.
6. The implications of assessment must be considered. A key question would be to what extent the validation process and assessment in particular should be formalised. It is argued that the term ‘formal’ by its nature applies to the validation process – but

perhaps the level of formalisation should be connected to the objectives of the applicant and the nature of the qualification awarded.

7. There needs to be careful consideration of the participation fee for individuals applying for RPL. While ideally also being less expensive than formal learning, the fee should be set according to several dimensions, such as the following: the real cost of the assessment process; the level of quality assurance involved; the amount of paperwork and administration required for the certification process; and the return on investment anticipated for successful applicants.
8. There is a clear difference in concept between a qualifications framework and recognition of a non-formal and informal learning outcomes system. The qualifications framework classifies the qualifications awarded after an assessment, while a recognition of formal and non-formal learning outcomes system aims to assess these learning outcomes. South Africa needs to consider a possible division of labour, perhaps with an inter-ministerial agency.
9. South Africa also needs to review whether RPL is the appropriate tool for redress. RPL is typically about a second chance for *qualification* rather than a second chance for *education*.

## **5.2 Review of South African policy and legislation that currently impact on RPL implementation**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

This section is a brief overview of existing legislation that frames education and training in South Africa, with the specific focus on whether and how it impacts on RPL. The section briefly examines whether there is overt reference to and recognition of RPL as an element within assessment and quality assurance processes carried out by learning providers. There is also reference to policies such as the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III, the Human Resource Development Strategy, and the National Planning Commission's report. If there is no reference to RPL in a piece of legislation, the question is whether there is tacit 'conduciveness/enablement' for RPL to happen or whether there are barriers in place that would hinder RPL from being one of the mainstream forms of assessment conducted by providers.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) is the overarching legislation that should be reflected in subsequent pieces of legislation, which are in place to ensure that the rights enshrined in the Constitution are implemented. There is increased recognition that all

forms of learning are important, and forms of knowledge gained in informal and non-formal environments should be acknowledged where necessary for formal award. In South Africa in particular there is increasing need to recognise formally all forms of learning through credible and reliable RPL praxis; especially to unlock an existing pipeline of skilled, competent and knowledgeable people into the economy. These people represent those previously disadvantaged by political, cultural, social and/or economic factors, and those who work in environments where new technologies and growth in information and knowledge have outstripped the ability of education and training institutions to develop formal programmes and curricula. The purpose is to guide considerations of possible amendments to legislation or policies, and to ensure that any confusion, ambiguities and barriers to mainstreaming RPL are removed. Hopefully, at another level, the brief examination that follows will be useful to encourage deeper research into how to translate enabling legislation into praxis.

## **5.2.2 Review of relevant legislation**

### **5.2.2.1 The Constitution**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) is recognised globally as one of the most beneficial and enabling towards the citizens of its country. It is well written, and never departs from ensuring and guaranteeing the human rights of South Africans. The Constitution is the 'supreme' piece of legislation, from which the others are developed and to which other legislation needs to 'answer'. Section 29 of the Constitution guarantees the right of all South Africans, inter alia, to:

- a) A basic education, including adult basic education; and
- b) Further education, which the state, through reasonable measures must make progressively available and accessible.

The Constitution is silent about RPL; yet its broad intent would appear to enable RPL implementation.

### **5.2.2.2 A consideration of relevant white papers**

#### ***White Paper 1: Education and Training (1995)***

White Paper 1 on Education and Training (DoE 1995) was the first step in formulating education policy in the government of national unity. Education and training is therefore located within the national Reconstruction and Development Programme, or RDP. The emphasis of the policy is on integration of education and training as a means to address past inequities in education and career choices and to promote lifelong learning. This integration is made possible through the development of the NQF. The policy states the following as it relates to integration:



An integrated approach to education and training linked to the development of a new National Qualification Framework (NQF) based on a system of credits for learning outcomes achieved, will encourage creative work on the design of curricula and the recognition of learning attainments wherever education and training are offered. It will open doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior knowledge (acquired informally or by work experience) has not been assessed and certified, or because their qualifications have not been recognised for admission to further learning or employment purposes. (DoE 1995: 7)

The policy emphasises the concept of lifelong learning and the link between education and the human resources development strategy. The policy states:

Such concepts are not the property of the Ministry of Education alone but are part of the emerging consensus on the importance of lifelong learning as the organising principle of a national human resource development strategy... (DoE 1995: 8)

The concept of lifelong learning organised in terms of a National Qualification Framework, is incorporated in the human resource development strategy of the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme. (DoE 1995: 9)

The partnership between the Ministry of Education and other ministries that house specialised competencies is also emphasised in the policy as a comprehensive strategy in the promotion of integration and lifelong learning:

In promoting an integrated approach to education and training under the NQF, the Ministry of Education does not wish to assume executive responsibility for the provision of training which falls within the competence of other Ministries. (DoE 1995: 9)

Most ministries have responsibilities for skills development and professional training within their spheres of competence, such as Health, Agriculture, Water Affairs and Forestry, Local Government, and Public Services...Learners engaged in education and training under the auspices of RDP programmes will be able to earn credits towards national qualifications by so doing. (DoE 1995: 16)

The national policy is embedded in values and principles stemming from basic human rights and acknowledgement of individual intrinsic value.

To this effect, the White Paper states:

The overarching goal of policy must enable all individuals to value, have access to, and succeed in lifelong education and training of good quality. Educational and management processes must therefore put the learner first, recognising and building on their knowledge and experience, and responding to their needs. An integrated

approach to education and training will increase access, mobility and quality in the national learning system. (DoE 1995, Chapter 4: 5)

### ***White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation (1997)***

White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) defined the principles, goals and structures for the transformation of the higher education system and its institutions around three core requirements: increased and broadened participation; responsiveness to societal interests and needs; and cooperation and partnerships in governance. With reference to increased and broadened participation, the policy states:

Successful policy must overcome historically determined patterns of fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency. It must increase access for black, women, disabled and mature students, and generate new curricula and flexible models of learning and teaching, including modes of delivery, to accommodate a larger and more diverse student population. (DoE 1997: 1.13)

Proceeding from this position, and again with reference to the fragmented and closed nature of the inherited system, the White Paper sets out the terms under which a single, coordinated system will be built in order to realise the stated goals of equity and development. The first mentioned key feature of this new system is that it will reflect “a broadening of the social base in terms of race, class, gender and age”:

The system will open its doors, in the spirit of lifelong learning, to workers and professionals in pursuit of multi-skilling and re-skilling, and adult learners whose access to higher education had been thwarted in the past. (DoE 1997: 2.2)

In Section 2.59 of the White Paper, RPL is mentioned in relation to distance education and resource-based learning, which are seen as

particularly appropriate for learners who are already in employment, or who need to earn in order to meet study costs. Many of these learners will offer prior learning and experience of an unconventional kind, and distance education and resource-based providers are ideally placed to pioneer the evaluation of prior learning and experience for access purposes. (DoE 1997: 27)

### ***White Paper 4: A programme for the Transformation of Further Education and Training (1998)***

The model for FET is tabled in White Paper 4 (DoE 1998) as one that is broad and inclusive in scope, promoting the integration of education and training so as to bridge the gap between academic and vocational education.

The new FET system seeks to provide an avenue for learner progression and mobility through offering an array of SAQA-accredited programmes to its lifelong learner citizens and equipping them with competencies for the global economy. Critical to this system is the

ability to offer learners flexibility and choices at different stages of their lives through the provision of the NQF. With regard to flexibility the policy states:

The ministry understands that when combined, these will place a premium on:

- ✓ Knowledge, skills and values that are transferable to different work and learning contexts;
- ✓ Access to and flexibility in learning and teaching, including the promotion of distance education and resource based learning, articulation between programmes and levels, approved standards and transferability of learning credits;
- ✓ The recognition of prior learning and experiences;
- ✓ Quality learning resources and materials, and a revitalised professional cadre; and
- ✓ Counselling and advocacy services and the remediation and job preparedness of learners. (DoE 1998: Section 4.18)

On the same issue, the White Paper further states:

The new FET curriculum will offer multiple entry points and a diversity of learning programmes and qualifications to meet the varied learners in different fields and at different stages of their lives. Learners who specialise early will be able to do so in the knowledge that this specialisation is neither too narrow nor deficient with respect to underpinning knowledge and values, and that further progression is possible. Learners who choose to specialise later will be assured that their programmes and qualifications provide adequate exposure to the realities and demands of social and economic life, as well as meaningful foundation for future specialisation. (DoE 1998: Section 4.23)

The policy is also clear in aligning its position to redress the inequalities of the past in terms of learning opportunities, as it states:

A modern and progressive framework for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) will be developed, so that those who have been denied formal opportunities for learning and those who have developed their knowledge and skills through self study or work experience, can be given credit and obtain a qualification without necessary duplication of effort. (DoE 1998: Section 4.25)

Another provision that comes out strongly in the policy is the issue of counselling and support services, which are essential in assisting learners to make choices in plotting learning and career pathways. The White Paper states:

Learner counselling and support services will be established to help new entrants to FET to make meaningful choices about their direction of study and to ensure that all learners, including previously excluded and disadvantaged groups, are given opportunity to succeed. Career guidance and support services will provide information on learning programmes, education and training providers,

qualifications and job opportunities...in addition we propose that the new funding arrangements provide for academic development, guidance, counselling, health, welfare and other learner support services. (DoE 1998: Section 4.27)

### 5.2.2.3 The NQF Act

The NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008) replaced the SAQA Act of 1995. The South African NQF is recognised as one of the so-called first generation NQFs. Its key objectives remain unchanged and reinforce the importance of the underlying principle of education for all. The NQF objectives are set out below.

The NQF Act (Sections 5.1 & 5.2) reaffirms the objectives of the NQF as:

- (1) (a) to create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- (b) to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;
- (c) to enhance the quality of education and training;
- (d) to accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
- (2) The objectives of the NQF are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

The NQF Act in South Africa is an enabling piece of legislation for RPL. Through implementing all aspects of the Act, RPL could become more mainstream, and provide one of the ways in which learners can gain access to learning opportunities, achieve credit towards a formal qualification, or be awarded a qualification should they meet all the quality assurance criteria of a specific qualification.

An analysis of regional NQF developments indicates that there are clear links between developing NQFs and how NQFs enable lifelong learning and cohesion in education and training systems, to the benefit of economies, communities and learners. The 'construct' of NQFs (mostly as an outcomes-based approach, with levels, level descriptors, qualification types, and notional hours or credit hours) are enabling mechanisms through which to develop RPL processes, which allow RPL candidates to present 'evidence' of knowledge, skills and competence towards credit or award of formal learning. RPL is recognised as a mechanism that opens access to people to learn further and to become lifelong learners, where they may have been unable to do so for various reasons. RPL is transformative and enabling in that non-formal and even informal learning achieved in different ways to that of formal learning can be recognised for credit, and opens a person's opportunities to

participate in lifelong learning (which is recognised as an essential element of improving skills development) and employability.

#### **5.2.2.4 The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Act**

The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Act, or GENFETQA (Act No. 58 of 2001, as amended in Act No. 50 of 2008), is silent about RPL, but there are references to assessment and accreditation of providers. The following selected sections quoted from the Act, Sections 2(h) and 2(l), indicate that an enabling environment exists for RPL assessment to be conducted:

“internal assessment” means any assessment conducted in an education institution contemplated in section 2, the outcomes of which count towards the achievement of a qualification;“...”qualification” means a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority...

It would be unusual for learners to gain access to or be awarded credits towards recognition of a part qualification in the context of schooling. However, in the context of adult education, and FET colleges, there is no reason why RPL should not be conducted as one of the mainstream assessment methods.

#### **5.2.2.5 The Skills Development Act**

The Skills Development Act, or SDA (No. 97 of 1998), provides for an institutional framework for the implementation of national, sector and workplace strategies, with the purpose of improving the skills of the South African workforce. This act is explicit on the need for redress through education and training,

to improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education.  
(4)

It is through the SDA that the SETAs were established.

In Chapter 6 (Section 22) of the SDA, the Act sets out the purpose of the Skills Development Planning Unit, which should have been established by the director general of the Department of Labour. This section of the SDA was pointed out by the DHET’s Advocate Eben Boschoff, given the RPL task team’s examination of possible legislative mechanisms through which to establish a possible RPL coordinating mechanism/institute. However, this Skills Development Planning Unit has a specific focus on researching and analysing labour market needs at national, sectoral and organs-of-state levels, assisting in the formulation of the national skills development strategy, and providing information on skills to the Minister (and various bodies/stakeholders in the skills development sector). The purpose of the unit

therefore does not lend itself to being a possible vehicle through which a national RPL coordinating mechanism/institute could be established.

#### 5.2.2.6 The Higher Education Act

The preamble to the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997, as amended by the Higher Education Amendment Act, No. 23 of 2001) underscores similar values as those set out in the Constitution and in the National Education Policy Act (No. 23 of 1996). There is nothing stated that could be viewed as being a barrier to implementation of recognition and validation of all forms of learning. Sections from the Preamble read as follows:

- ESTABLISH a single coordinated higher education system which promotes cooperative governance and provides for programme-based higher education;
- RESTRUCTURE AND TRANSFORM programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic;
- REDRESS past discrimination and ensure representivity and equal access;
- PROVIDE optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge;
- PROMOTE the values which underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom;

The Higher Education Act itself creates the environment for RPL to happen, evidenced by recognition in the Act of the need for redress, the provision of optimal opportunities for learning, promotion of values, and the promotion of the full realisation of the potential of every student and employee.

Section 1 of the Higher Education Act, dealing with definitions, includes the definition “to provide higher education”, which means registering students for completing qualifications at or above NQF Level 5, or for part of a qualification that meets the requirements of a unit standard as recognised by SAQA. It could be reasonably concluded from this section of the Act that RPL assessment could be conducted for *access*, which would enable a student to register for a complete qualification upon successful completion of an RPL assessment; and for *credit accumulation* for partial completion of a qualification, and for a student to register for part of a qualification. The reasons that this does not happen could be examined, but one of the barriers already mentioned is the 50% residency clause (see more on this below).

Section 37(3) of the Higher Education Act – “admission to public higher education institutions” – could be read that provision is made for RPL to be implemented for redress, and to ensure there is no discrimination. It reads as follows:

- 3) The admission policy of a public higher education institution must provide appropriate measures *for the redress of past inequalities and may not unfairly discriminate in any way.* (emphasis added)

However Section (4)(a) to (d) could be read in such a way that there appears to be a tacit challenge to RPL being implemented in higher education institutions. The section reads as follows:

- 4) Subject to this Act, the council may, with the approval of the senate -
  - a) determine entrance requirements in respect of particular higher education programmes;
  - b) determine the number of students who may be admitted for a particular higher education programme and the manner of their selection;
  - c) determine the minimum requirements for readmission to study at the public higher education institution concerned; and
  - d) refuse readmission to a student who fails to satisfy such minimum requirements for readmission.

The Higher Education Act was amended to include Complete and Partial Exemption Requirements (such as the mature-age exemption clauses) as published in Gazette No. 31674 on 5 December 2008 (DHET 2008). While these are gazetted formats of RPL and are being used at some universities, some research will need to be undertaken to establish how the exemptions are being applied by universities. In addition, the amended document (DHET 2008) refers to exemptions being endorsed by the “Committee of Principals” – but it is not clear who or what this body is, as the Universities Act of 1955 (which established the Committee of Technikon Principals and the Committee of University Principals) has mostly been repealed by the Higher Education Act of 1997, except for Section 74 of the old Act, which deals with the Matriculation Board.

#### **5.2.2.7 Background to the 50% residency clause in higher education**

The 50% residency clause (already mentioned at various points in the current report) is applied in higher education institutions, and is regarded by many as a barrier to RPL implementation in higher education. Reliance on the residency clause appears to be linked to the higher education funding formula, and institutional status.

The 50% residency clause emanated from the Joint Statute of Universities of 1955 (as amended in 1962, 1967, 1971, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1986 and 1988). Paragraph 18 of the Joint Statute of Universities stipulates under which conditions attendance, certificates of proficiency and recognition of courses passed at a university or other institution could be accepted by the receiving university.

Paragraph 18(1) states:

Subject to the provisions of subparagraph (2), the senate of a university may accept as part of the attendance of a student for admission to a degree of bachelor, other than a one-year honours degree of bachelor of that university, periods of attendance

as a registered matriculated student at any other university or institution, and may accept, as far as practicable, certificates of proficiency in any subject issued by such other university or such other institution: Provided that the foregoing shall also apply in the case of periods of attendance and subjects passed for diplomas with a minimum duration of three years which have successfully been completed at a university or another institution and on account of which the Board has granted full or conditional exemption from the matriculation exemption, backdated to the commencement of the year in which credit for such diploma was first earned; and provided further that the provisions of subparagraph (2) shall also apply to such diplomas completed at the same university as that at which the student concerned is to be admitted to a degree of bachelor.

Paragraph 18(2) states:

A candidate shall not be admitted to an ordinary degree of bachelor in terms of subparagraph (1) unless -

- a) his periods of attendance are together not less than the complete period prescribed for admission to such degree;
- b) he attended at the university that confers the degree courses prescribed by that university -
  - i. for a degree for which the period of attendance is three academic years, for at least two academic years: Provided that he has attended as a registered student for that degree *at least half of the total number of courses prescribed for the degree,*
  - ii. for any other degree of bachelor, at least two academic years, except for the degree of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.), or Bachelor of Physical Education (B.Ed.Ph.), or Bachelor of Philosophy (B.Phil.) for which the period of attendance may be one academic year. (emphasis added)

The 50% residency clause is embedded in an institutional context in terms of the following:

- Student mobility from one institution to another.
- The responsibility of the receiving university to confer a degree as a result of learning that took place at more than one institution.

It seems, from the context provided by the above information, that the purpose of the 50% residency clause was to protect the academic integrity of the receiving institution. Such an arrangement makes it impossible to recognise knowledge obtained elsewhere that could qualify for an advanced status that covers more than 50% of a programme. It seems that in recent higher education policy documents the 50% residency clause is situated differently. The Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF), for example, applies the 50% residency clause to credit arrangements between qualifications to rule movement of



students from one qualification to another *within* the same institution (DoE 2007: 9), and not *between* institutions.

The question is: Does the 50% residency clause still serve as a mechanism to protect academic integrity? If so, it does not make sense that when students move from one qualification to another within the same institution, academic integrity needs to be protected by such a clause. There are quality assurance measures already in place to ensure quality of delivery across an institution. If the 50% residency clause is restored to its original institutional context, there should be no reason why RPL could not be applied to its fullest consequences in higher education.

### 5.2.3 Testing the 50% residency clause in higher education

On 13 and 14 June 2011, Mr Moramang Simon Masisi and the South African Human Rights Commission approached the Equality Court for relief in a matter related to what was stated to be discrimination against Mr Masisi as a result of North West University's (NWU) application of the 50% residency clause. The case raises some interesting points, which are listed briefly below:

- If the applicant (Mr Masisi) had achieved his BProc Degree from NWU then he would have had all the relevant credits from his BProc degree accepted as credit for his Bachelor of Laws (LLB). Because Mr Masisi obtained his BProc from another university, only 50% of the relevant courses for credit towards a LLB were accepted. This is seen to be discriminatory.
- The counsel for both parties “failed to appreciate the real issue to be determined in this matter. The *ultra vires* argument advanced by Mr Masisi could have been resolved in the High Court and as such falls outside of the jurisdiction of the Equality Court...To my mind the only issue for determination by this Court is whether the contents of the aforesaid rules and Joint Statute and the application thereof by the NWU constitutes unfair discrimination against the applicant as defined in the Equality Act” (Equality Court North West 2011: 12).
- “I am convinced that the provisions of the aforesaid rules of the NWU as well as the Joint Statute and its enforcement by the NWU amounts to systemic discrimination as envisaged in Section 1(1)(xii)(b)(i) and/or (iii) of the Equality Act”(Equality Court North West 2011: 14).
- Systemic disadvantage definitions: “systemic” means “of or relating to a system as a whole” (Equality Court North West 2011: 15), and the provisions of the Equality Act

should be *widely* interpreted and *generously* applied” (Equality Court North West 2011: 16).

- In terms of Section 13(2)(b) of the Equality Act, the said discrimination is deemed unfair unless the NWU proved that discrimination is fair (Equality Court North West 2011: 16).
- The order that is made declares that
  - “the provisions contained in par. 15.1.1, 15.1.3, 15.2.1 and 15.2.3 of the rule G15 of the General Academic Rules of the NWU are hereby struck down and declared null and void’;
  - The proviso to rule A5.7.1, “*provided that the exemption shall not be granted for more than half of the number of modules required for the curriculum*” of the General Academic Rules of the NWU is hereby struck down and declared null and void;
  - Section 18(2)(b)(i) and (ii) of the Joint Statute of the universities in the RSA approved by the Minister under the Universities Act No. 61 of 1955 (the Joint Statute) is hereby struck down and declared null and void, except to the extent that Section 8(2)(b)(ii) apply to candidates writing the degree of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), or Bachelor of Physical Education (B.Ed.Ph) or a Bachelor of Philosophy (B. Phil).
  - The first and third respondents are directed to grant exemption to the applicant for purposes of writing the LLB Degree of all those applicable courses and/or modules successfully completed by the applicant at the NWU for his B.Proc. degree.

The applicant also sought the striking down of Section 74(6) of the Higher Education Act on the basis that this was purported to be unconstitutional. The ruling found in paragraph 16.1 states that “It appears to me that Section 74(6) of the Higher Education Act (HEA) serves a necessary transitional purpose, and the striking down of this section may impact detrimentally on a number of other joint statutes and regulations unrelated to the issues hereto” (Equality Court North West 2011: 18).

From the ruling it becomes apparent that the judge applied his mind to only the issue at hand, that is, the discriminatory components of certain general joint statutes of universities and policies of the practices of the NWU in particular, as these relate to the 50% residency clause. For the purposes of the current report, it is important to note the ruling as it applies to RPL praxis, and CAT praxis applied in higher education institutions.

## **5.3 Current South African policy, and related contextual shifts that may impact on RPL**

As a result of a greater focus on coordination of different but interlinked aspects of government planning and implementation activities, a number of national-level initiatives are under way that must be considered in relation to RPL.

### **5.3.1 The HRD Strategy, the National Planning Commission Report and the National Skills Development Strategy III, and the Green Paper for Post-school Education and Training**

#### **5.3.1.1 Overview**

The overarching intention of these four separate but linked strategies and reports is captured in the introduction to the Green Paper:

There are many challenges facing post-school education in South Africa. Despite the many advances and gains made since 1994, the system continues to produce and reproduce gender, class, racial and other inequalities with regard to access to educational opportunities and success. One of the greatest challenges facing the system is the large number of young people who face a very bleak future if major changes are not introduced. Equally important, the post-school system is not meeting the needs of the economy and society as a whole. This Green Paper aims to align the post-school education and training system with South Africa's overall development agenda, with links to various development strategies such as the New Growth Path, the Industrial Policy Action Plan 2, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa 2010–2030, and South Africa's Ten-Year Innovation Plan. This will allow it to contribute more effectively to the goal of inclusive economic growth and development, and to contribute to fundamentally reducing unemployment and poverty. (DHET 2012a: x)

The Minister of Higher Education and Training has previously, in other documents, presentations and speeches, expressed a similar desire to strengthen the education and training system, through the following:

- Strengthening the cohesion within the system of education and training demand and supply.
- Addressing scarce and critical skills required for economic, social, community and personal development.
- Addressing unemployment by providing enabling legislation, policies and praxis for sustainable job creation and economic growth.

It is especially in the area of “addressing the needs of the overwhelming majority of our people” that new and direct RPL policy could be included in policy documents and reports.

The Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training and the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III specifically speak about RPL, while the other two reports are silent. Reading 'behind' the words of all these reports, one gains the impression though that creating an enabling and positive environment for all forms of knowledge to be assessed, valued and recognised will be one of the ways to address skills shortages, advance the hopes for further learning of millions of South Africans, and open employment opportunities to those excluded because of lack of formal recognition of what they already know and can do.

### **5.3.1.2 RPL-related public comments on the Green Paper**

This sub-section provides a brief summary of the comments received from the public comment phase that was concluded by 30 April 2012. The comments were provided to the RPL MTT in a format that did not include the names of the individuals or organisations that submitted the comments. All that was indicated was the category or sector of the respondents.

#### ***Quality assurance and/or professional bodies***

- Support the need to clarify and focus RPL.
- Propose that consideration should be given to simple and practical tools for RPL implementation in the workplace.
- Propose the establishment of an agency to drive RPL.
- Suggest the need for a strategic focus on making alternative access routes across learning systems known and user-friendly.
- Suggest the need to create an understanding of the specialised nature of RPL. Further propose funding for the pedagogical nature of alternative access practices.
- Suggest the need to make provision for the appointment and training of dedicated RPL personnel at all public and private (education and training) institutions and selected workplaces.
- Suggest the need for professionalisation of RPL assessors and moderators.

#### ***NGOs/ civic organisations***

- Suggest that RPL systems be reconstructed to make RPL more user-friendly.

#### ***Employer/employer organisations***

- Suggest the need to actively promote RPL.

#### ***Universities***

- Suggest that RPL initiatives be supported and strengthened at the national level.

### *Other groups*

RPL is not only about credit recognition within or towards a qualification, but also about the recognition of experiential learning. One of the challenges that must be dealt with – in public institutions, private providers and workplaces alike – is that prior experiential learning does not always fit neatly into the learning outcomes as sometimes narrowly expressed in unit standards-based qualifications.

The recognition of experiential knowledge is crucial for redress. One implication of this is that the training of RPL assessors and advisors must be undertaken differently from what is currently being practised. Another implication is that narrow conceptions of what constitutes ‘valid’ knowledge (especially if these are linked to narrow interpretations of knowledge, skills and competence outcomes as expressed in qualifications and/or unit standards) may cause obstacles for recognising people’s prior experiential learning and alternative or non-‘mainstream’ knowledge.

Alternative ways of thinking about RPL need to be considered.

### *Unions/employee organisations*

- Hold a strong view that RPL should be a prerequisite for adults accessing training programmes, to acknowledge the knowledge and experience they have as a basis for access to further education and training.
- Suggest that the system provide a clear framework with regard to RPL as well as to monitoring and evaluation.

### *SETAs*

- Argue that the Green Paper only discusses RPL in terms of formal training.
- Point out that the Green Paper does not look at the cost of RPL.
- Suggest that the task team also look at the RPL of informal learning.
- Suggest there is the need for an RPL policy.
- Suggest that some FET colleges be supported to become RPL centres or house RPL centres.
- Suggest that the NQF must not only allow for flexibility, progression and articulation across all levels but must also include the RPL pathways. It is also important that the QCTO span all 10 levels of the NQF, to allow for full recognition of vocational, occupational and professional qualifications.

### *Individual members of the public*

- Suggest that community education and training centres (CETCs) be recognised as providers of modules of employable skills, and be quality assured by the QCTO in a light-touch fashion. Emphasis should also be placed on RPL of these skills. This should be done, wherever possible, in partnership with those institutions and workplaces offering

the full occupational programmes, so that the progression pathway is laid out. These linkages should be apparent at system level. CETCs should also offer the foundational learning competence (FLC) of the QCTO.

- Commend the recognition of an RPL-type approach within formal education and provides an example of a joint initiative between an FET college in KwaZulu-Natal and the Danish organisation Humana People, whereby learners participate in a six-month NQF Level 4 community development work qualification at the college before undertaking a six-month practical aimed at community development.
- Criticise the fact that the Green Paper refers to the importance of providing individuals with the skills they need to be “productive, flexible, innovative and able to earn sustainable livelihoods” yet fails to further define and clarify such concepts.
- Propose that new qualifications factor in existing knowledge of communities (RPL). New professions should be linked with the skills and knowledge ordinary citizens need. At the moment, South Africans need houses, sanitation, health, food, governance, and an understanding of forces that govern them (national and international). The proposal included an appeal to the Minister to package these skills with every qualification offered by the education department.
- Criticise the fact that RPL constitutes a very small section of the Green Paper.
- One individual shared that he has an incomplete architecture qualification from a technikon but due to a non-existing RPL policy cannot access a higher education institution to complete his qualification, even though he has 18 years of experience in the field.
- Propose that once FET colleges become a central feature of communities – rural and urban – the colleges also become centres where adults can receive recognition for their skills and knowledge (RPL) and ultimately further their education, and that the centres also provide career advice.
- Suggest that all universities implement an RPL policy that takes into account work experience, so that students with incomplete qualifications may be given an opportunity to complete these. Part-time classes should be made available to RPL candidates, as these students often work during the day and can only study after working hours.

### **5.3.2 National artisan development: RPL model framework**

The Human Resources Development Council South Africa (HRDC-SA) has established the Artisan and Technician Development Technical Task Team (ATD-TTT) in support of government’s economic development plans to increase the production of artisans. The HRDC-SA has indicated that RPL is a key priority. The INDLELA<sup>18</sup> RPL Unit, in collaboration with the National Artisan Moderating Body (NAMB) and with stakeholder inputs from the ATD-TTT, has developed an RPL model.

---

<sup>18</sup> Institute for the National Development of Learnerships, Employment Skills and Labour Assessments

### 5.3.3 SAQA

As a result of the changes to the NQF and skills development legislation, SAQA is refining and reconceptualising a number of key activity areas that will impact on future RPL implementation.

#### 5.3.3.1 Policy development processes, including RPL

In order to align its policies with the NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008), SAQA has, as already mentioned, established the RPL reference group to revise its RPL policy and criteria, as the SAQA RPL policy must provide the overarching framework for the RPL policies of the three quality councils. The quality councils are being consulted as part of the process of the development of the SAQA RPL policy.

The current revised policy (SAQA 2012b) seeks to position RPL in relation to the following key priority areas:

- a) Redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities;
- b) Access to quality learning pathways for all South Africans, including unemployed persons;
- c) Fair recognition of knowledge and skills in the workforce in South Africa. (SAQA 2012: 5)

Importantly, the draft RPL policy indicates:

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

- a) the focus is on what has been learned and not on the status of the institution, organisation or place where the learning was obtained;
- b) credit is awarded for knowledge and skills acquired through experience and not for experience alone;
- c) learning is made explicit through assessment and/or other methods that engage the intrinsic development of knowledge, skills and competencies acquired;
- d) 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; and
- e) notwithstanding all of the features listed here, RPL is generally considered to be a developmental process, and not an end in itself. (SAQA 2012b: 11)

SAQA is also responsible for the development of policy with regard to CAT and assessment, after consultation with the quality councils. The two additional policies will take into account the related revised RPL policy. SAQA has developed policy and criteria for the

recognition of professional bodies and the registration of professional designations (SAQA 2012a) and built into this policy is the implementation of RPL. SAQA is using the policy and criteria as a tool to ensure that RPL is recognised as an important component of the activity of professional bodies.

#### **5.3.3.2 Career Advice Helpline**

Documentation provided by SAQA (January 2012) to the RPL MTT on queries dealt with by the helpline indicates that although the term 'RPL' is not frequently used by callers, it is used by helpline staff. Analysis of the responses indicates the following issues:

- SETAs/ETQAs and accredited providers appear to be struggling to advise on and implement RPL.
- There is a general lack of awareness on the part of the public about what RPL is, what it can and cannot do, and where it is available.
- There is a general lack of knowledge, among employers, about the NQF, its levels and the different types of qualifications at those levels; this includes examples of people who obtained qualifications pre-NQF and whose employers now refuse to recognise such qualifications.

#### **5.3.3.3 Advocacy for RPL**

SAQA has been involved in advocacy for RPL through conferences and seminars involving both local and international experts. Publications of the RPL conferences and seminars are made available in a variety of ways and forms. SAQA is also maintaining a database of 400 practitioners and has established an RPL portal for purposes of networking and disseminating information about RPL activities.

#### **5.3.3.4 Coordination of projects**

Another area with which SAQA is currently engaged is providing support to a number of RPL-related projects. Such support includes providing assistance with policy development and implementation, for example to the following:

- The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA);
- The Marine Industry Association (MIA) – for boat builders;
- Medical Laboratory Scientists;
- The Council for Development Practitioners;
- The South African Police Services (SAPS);
- The Health Professions Council (HPCSA) – for psychology professionals;
- The South African State Information Technology Agency (SITA); and
- Game rangers.



Advice and assistance are also given to individuals who are experiencing difficulties within learning institutions, state departments and private companies regarding RPL.

#### **5.3.3.5 International liaison**

Through its International Liaison function, SAQA has established partnerships with a number of countries and international bodies (UNESCO, Commonwealth of Learning etc.), and collaborates on research and development projects. For example, SAQA partnered with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning on a six-country study on RPL on the African continent and developed guidelines for RPL within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

SAQA, in partnership with UWC, developed a course on NQFs and lifelong learning, which has a component on RPL and has attracted participants nationally (KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Western Cape) and internationally (Botswana, Swaziland, Australia). The course includes both face-to-face and e-learning components. One of the objectives of the course is to build a network of practitioners with a deep understanding of NQFs and related concepts like RPL.

#### **5.3.4 Quality councils and the three qualification sub-frameworks**

As part of the refinement of the NQF, three related qualifications sub-frameworks, each overseen by its own quality council, was gazetted for public comment in December 2011 (DHET 2011d).

It is clear from the Minister of Higher Education and Training's introductory statements in the government gazette of the three qualification sub-frameworks (DHET 2011d) that there is the intention for all learners to be able to progress unhindered and with the "greatest possible degree of mobility" through the education and training system. The introduction states:

The NQF is essentially a system for bringing order and coherence into the complex arena of education and training, assisting learners and workers to progress in their education and career paths, and ensuring that South African qualifications are both relevant and of a high standard. (p. 3)

Our integrated NQF must facilitate the greatest possible degree of mobility for learners and workers through our systems of learning, and in particular must indicate the development of an integrated post-school system. (p. 4)

The NQF must be a supple instrument in the service of a well functioning integrated education and training system. (p. 4)

All three sub-frameworks speak to the issue of RPL. According to SAQA (n.d.), the three quality councils (Umalusi, the Council on Higher Education, or CHE, and the QCTO) were required to establish certain sub-framework policies, including for RPL, by 2012.

#### 5.3.4.1 Umalusi

In the general and further education and training (GENFET) sub-framework, allowance is made for learners entering the system through achievement of credits obtained through RPL; paragraphs 62 to 65 and Annexure 1 of the sub-frameworks document speak to the issue of RPL. In paragraph 64, it states that Umalusi “has policy regarding credit recognition, accumulation and transfer of credits, and the recognition of prior learning, as these are practised in a large scale, massified education and training system” (DHET 2011d: 19).

However, the GENFET sub-framework contains sections that would be barriers to RPL; that is, Sections 51–62, which deal with assessment, appear to make it difficult to conduct RPL to satisfy the assessment requirements stipulated by Umalusi. These barriers should be reviewed with a view to amending them; and the sub-framework should be reviewed in order to enable RPL to be mainstreamed in the FET and adult education systems.

Umalusi has a draft policy that sets out its position regarding RPL in the context of the qualifications on the GENFET sub-framework. Reflecting some of the knowledge debates outlined above, the Umalusi position is that its qualifications are knowledge based and institution focused, which means that they are not conducive to RPL. For example, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is a school qualification requiring 12 years of schooling as well as particular achievements in relation to Grades 10, 11 and 12.

The Umalusi view is that the National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) will allow a differentiated route for adults and out-of-school candidates, which in time will become equivalent to the NSC. This initiative is not dissimilar to the recontextualisations of school qualifications for adults and RPL purposes undertaken in Portugal. The NASCA is a very good example of an adult-friendly qualification; it takes the form of a set of challenge exams, which allows candidates to show what they are capable of. There are no formal learning programme requirements, although candidates are advised that participating in a programme is likely to improve their chances of passing the examinations. The NASCA is currently under review and institutional arrangements for RPL, as provided for within the qualification, will require careful formulation and implementation.

#### 5.3.4.2 QCTO

The QCTO sub-framework creates an enabling environment for RPL to be conducted; in fact, it is silent about RPL, but the tacit intention of creating a flexible process to allow a learner

to have maximum mobility is the underpinning approach of the sub-framework for occupations and trades.

In terms of other relevant QCTO policies, the *Curriculum and Assessment Policy* (QCTO 2011) indicates that subject and module specifications should indicate exemptions, including RPL, but no further guidance or directive is provided. With regard to assessment, the policy states that “The same assessment criteria linked to each curriculum component will be applied when conducting assessments for the purpose of RPL already completed in some prior site and for identifying learning gaps” (QCTO 2011: 8).

It will be critical for the QCTO, as it develops and refines its policies, to engage much more deeply with issues relating to RPL (especially considering the findings from the research into RPL practices in SETAs, as presented in Chapter 3 of the current report).

#### 5.3.4.3 Council on Higher Education (CHE)

##### *CHE instruments for information on RPL*

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has used three main instruments for gathering information on RPL:

- Through the initial programme accreditation process.
- Through institutional audits.
- Through monitoring the quality assurance processes of the functions that its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) had previously delegated to higher education institutions (until the legislative changes brought about by the NQF Act of 2008), namely: training and development in assessment; moderation of assessment; RPL; and arrangements for certification.

According to the CHE programme accreditation criteria document (2004b):

Criterion 6 for programme accreditation requires that RPL be one of the processes for which there are appropriate and rigorous procedures for assessment:

The different types of mode of delivery of the programme have appropriate policies and procedures for internal assessment; internal and external moderation; monitoring of student progress; explicitness, validity and reliability of assessment practices; recording of assessment; settling of disputes; the rigour and security of the assessment system; *RPL*; and for the development of staff competence in assessment. (CHE 2004b: 12, emphasis added)

With particular relevance to RPL, the *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* further specifically requires that a higher education institution has

...appropriate policies and procedures for RPL, including the identification, documentation, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning against

specified learning outcomes, so that it can articulate with current programmes and qualifications. Assessment instruments are designed for RPL in accordance with the institution's policies on fair and transparent assessment. (CHE 2004b: 12)

According to the CHE institutional audits criteria document (2004a):

Criterion 14 for institutional audits requires that an institution has an RPL policy, and effective procedures for recognising prior learning and assessing current competence.

In order to meet this criterion, the following are examples of what would be expected:

- (i) Institutional policy to support access, through RPL measures.
- (ii) Effective procedures stipulated for RPL. This includes the identification, documentation, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning against specified learning outcomes, so that it can articulate with current academic programmes and qualifications.
- (iii) Assessment instruments designed for RPL and implemented in accordance with the institution's policies on fair and transparent assessment. (CHE 2004a: 15–16)

The *HEQC Framework for Delegated Functions* (CHE 2008) outlined the procedures, criteria and minimum requirements for the delegation of quality assurance procedures to institutions in respect of RPL. Criterion 4 of that framework required institutions to have in place "a policy and effective procedures for the recognition and assessment of prior learning" (CHE 2008: 18). In order to meet this criterion, the following minimum requirements needed to be met:

- A policy outlining the context, purpose, principles and approach to RPL as part of the institution's mission and goals. Copies of this policy had to be available to the public and relevant statutory bodies.
- Clearly stipulated, documented and available effective procedures for the implementation of all RPL services offered by the institution. These procedures had to include identification, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning against specified learning outcomes.
- A clear documentation of details and standards in respect of (a) the dissemination of information about the RPL services at the institution and how to access advice; and (b) administrative systems for the application, registration, record-keeping and other operational procedures for all RPL services, including all forms of assessment.
- Appropriately qualified and/or experienced staff to ensure the integrity and effective implementation of RPL processes.
- A process in place to ensure that admission of students through the RPL route does not normally constitute more than 10% of the student intake, although institutions could offer valid reasons for exceeding the norm within moderate limits.

- Review, planning and research practices reflected in the continuous improvement of RPL services.

Following the changes emanating from the NQF Act of 2008, the CHE has withdrawn the delegated functions, and now monitors RPL as part of the institutional audit process.

### *The HEQF*

In the higher education sub-framework, the section dealing with progression within the framework makes specific mention of RPL and CAT, but there are barriers to RPL, in that the document states that “the HEQF allows for CAT provided that no more than 50% of the credits required for the other qualification are credits that have been used for a completed qualification” (DHET 2011d: 61).

#### **5.3.4.4 Public comment issues on the three sub-frameworks**

It is SAQA’s task to consider all comments received on the three qualifications sub-frameworks through the public comment phase and to advise the Minister of Higher Education and Training on key issues for finalising the qualifications sub-frameworks. Below are some of the key issues on which SAQA is focusing.

### *RPL*

RPL as an access tool, an incentive to learning and a means for recognising learning achievements is a priority for the country. A keen understanding of context is needed in any implementation of RPL approaches. However, contextual or sectoral differences in approach do not change the fact that each sub-framework must make an explicit commitment to the integration of RPL considerations in any qualification design and programme delivery. There are necessary areas of overlap between the sub-frameworks in certain families of qualifications. Mechanisms for dialogue between quality councils regarding articulation pathways must also address RPL overlaps. RPL has been foregrounded as a key aspect of the NQF and impacts in a major way on the implementation of the sub-frameworks. This can be more clearly reflected in their formulation.

### *CAT*

CAT is inseparable from the broad concern with articulation and RPL. The nature and status of credits and their portability must be clearly defined. Although policy is still being developed in this area, a commitment to CAT should be expressed explicitly in the sub-frameworks.

### *Lifelong learning*

The concept of lifelong learning was central to the formation of the NQF. The idea accommodates the lifelong, life-wide, life-deep desires to learn of those who, for whatever reason, do not complete their studies when they are young. It is an enabling idea, where

attempts are made to make learning possible for those for whom constraints historically blocked – and continue to block – learning opportunities.

Lifelong learning must be given due attention in the covering preamble of the three sub-frameworks, and a commitment to lifelong learning must be apparent in the working of the sub-frameworks themselves and in their potential interrelationship.

### *Open, informal and non-formal education*

All three sub-frameworks focus on formal education and training. In addition, some consideration of how open learning approaches and informal and non-formal education are addressed within each sector must be included in the sub-frameworks. This is consonant with the rapidly growing international appreciation of the growth of sources of learning outside of formal settings. More important, it is essential to the implementation of RPL.

### *Parity of esteem*

Most of the issues in this section relate to the NQF's quest for parity of esteem across different forms of knowledge, skill and competence. A major motivation for the move to the NQF Act of 2008 was to give recognition to these differences. It is important that the striving for parity also be kept in the equation. Although it is one of the most challenging intentions of the NQF to implement against class and institutional interests, the intention must inform the formulation and presentation of the three sub-frameworks.

### *Professional bodies*

Some submissions in the public comment express concern about the role of professional bodies and their associated qualifications, in relation to lack of cohesion between academic and professional pathways, and the locus of quality assurance for certain qualifications.

In satisfaction of Chapter 6:28 of the NQF Act, professional bodies and professional qualifications and designations can and must be accommodated within the three sub-frameworks. SAQA currently sees no need to develop an additional sub-framework.

However, rules or a model for cooperation between professional bodies and the quality councils need to be made explicit in explanatory versions of the sub-frameworks, in support of the unique role played by professional bodies. Professional qualifications must be accommodated on the relevant sub-framework. Those that are typically postgraduate and historically delivered at universities at NQF Levels 8 and above clearly belong on the HEQF. Most occupational qualifications up to NQF Level 6 or even 7 equally clearly belong on the OQF – Occupational Qualifications Framework. Mechanisms for clarifying grey areas must be required by the framework (but not specified in detail) and disputes will be arbitrated by SAQA.

In the interests of the integrity of the NQF and the standing of professional designations, these must be registered on the levels of the NQF in a way that takes into account specific

contexts, the level of the underpinning qualification and the applicability of the level descriptors.

There are existing and emerging examples of articulation and pathway agreements relating to professional bodies. These may be encouraged by the sub-frameworks but are properly the subject matter of separate guidelines or other, more appropriate, documentation and do not belong in the sub-frameworks.

#### **5.3.4.5 Subsequent Ministerial determination of sub-frameworks**

In December 2012, DHET gazetted the *Determination of the sub-frameworks that comprise the National Qualifications Framework* (DHET 2012e). Section 19 notes that SAQA has been requested "... to advise on articulation pathways for the NQF. This work includes the prioritisation of Recognition of Prior Learning" (DHET 2012e: 9).

### **5.3.5 Ministerial Task Teams**

In order to better understand and improve key aspects of the post-school education and training system, the Minister of Higher Education and Training has established a number of task teams. Those that relate to RPL in some way are discussed here.

#### **5.3.5.1 South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training**

This MTT is responsible for developing the framework under which a South African Institute for Vocational and Continuing Education and Training (SAIVCET) will be established. Its terms of reference are as follows:

- Examine the list of possible functions set out in the Green Paper as well as other functions that it may deem desirable for the Institute and make recommendations regarding the role the Institute could play in supporting and strengthening of vocational and continuing education and skills development in South Africa.
- Make recommendations regarding the establishment of the Institute, including its legal and organisational form.
- Develop a draft Framework for the establishment of SAIVCET.

Unfortunately, at the time of submission of the RPL MTT's report, the SAIVCET MTT had only just completed the literature review activity. The director for special projects in the Ministry of Higher Education and Training indicated that the focus of SAIVCET will be mainly on strengthening and expanding the FET colleges and their relationship to other key players and sub-sectors in the post-school system.

The work of the SAIVCET MTT was considered by the RPL MTT at two levels: in order to understand whether SAIVCET would include RPL as one of its areas of activity, and whether it could be considered as a possible (initial and temporary) institutional ‘home’ for the proposed RPL institute.

#### **5.3.5.2 Community Education and Training Centres**

The Ministerial Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres (CETC MTT) was established to investigate and make recommendations for an institutional model of CETCs that addresses the learning needs of adults and out-of-school youth. The report (DHET 2012b) notes the trend towards locating community and adult education in a lifelong learning paradigm. Part of the research conducted by the CETC MTT includes the development of a differentiated analysis (by age cohorts, ranging from under-15s who have dropped out of school to the age range 25–65) of needs in terms of both formal and non-formal learning opportunities and qualifications/types.

The model proposed by the CETC MTT is a multi-tier institutional and qualifications framework that provides multiple access and progression opportunities and includes existing institutional types such as universities and FET colleges. Community learning centres are proposed as a third institutional type that should include a range of learning opportunities for not only literacy and basic and secondary education, but also vocational and occupational programmes, as well as non-formal programmes. In order to achieve the establishment of the model – both establishing new institutional types and harnessing existing networks – the CETC MTT has proposed the creation of an Adult and Youth Community Learning Agency.

The report includes, as part of its international literature review (DHET 2012b: 41), a brief section on RPL. However, the summary appears to focus mainly on summative assessment approaches, although it is unfortunately too brief to provide further assistance in thinking about RPL in relation to CETCs. What it does do is affirm that RPL is both possible and necessary, while acknowledging that there are barriers to its implementation in South Africa.

Further consideration of local or regional RPL centres, as part of the proposed CETC system, will be necessary as both the RPL and CETC systems are developed.

#### **5.3.5.3 SETA Performance**

The RPL MTT considered the report (DHET 2012d) of the SETA Performance MTT to better understand any possible recommended changes to the way SETAs are funded or undertake



funding of special projects, as well as to understand recommendations relating to the scope of SETAs and the roles and responsibilities of ETQA-type functions.

The SETA Performance MTT has made a number of pertinent recommendations in its report:

- That the SETAs need a tighter focus on skills development (DHET 2012d: 13–14), with a stronger focus on the ETQA function to “support providers to conduct high quality, relevant education and training”, which implies expanding the capacity development and quality promotion activities of ETQAs.
- That the funding percentage to the National Skills Fund (NSF) be increased from 20% to 30% (DHET 2012d: 21). The MTT acknowledges that while the NSF has not been spending sufficiently and has built up a significant reserve of funds, this is because its fund disbursement approach is not adequate and it is not adequately responding to national development and economic priorities.
- There needs to be a national central mechanism/body through which skills demands in the short, medium and long term are analysed (DHET 2012d: 25) at the macro level, across SETAs. This body will also strengthen labour market research approaches and processes and improve the quality of data.

#### 5.3.5.4 NCV Review

This MTT’s mandate was to review the National Certificate Vocational (NCV), which is delivered mainly in FET colleges, as a number of challenges in the curriculum and in implementation have been identified.

#### *Challenges in respect of the current qualification and possible solutions*

The report (DHET 2012c) notes the following among the challenges currently experienced:

1. There is no clarity in terms of whether the qualification is intended as an occupational training initiative or as a fully fledged vocational qualification. Clarity of the purpose of the qualification would assist in determining where the qualification rests and who is supposed to provide its quality assurance.
2. There is no clarity in terms of the optimal mode of delivery of the NCV.
3. The admission requirements for entry to the NCV qualification should be properly stated, focusing more on the cognitive prerequisite of a learner rather than on an age indication.
4. Students completing the NSC are referred to the NCV as a possibility towards a career-driven qualification. However, because both the NSC and the NCV are located at Level 4 on the NQF, this becomes a repetitive practice. Two recommendations were made in this regard:
  - i. Provide greater advocacy in the schools at Grade 9 level, so that learners are introduced to the NCV qualification and know its merits and benefits; and

- ii. Introduce RPL so that learners do not get to repeat subjects unnecessarily if they have already been deemed competent in these.
5. Currently the NCV has multiple entry and exit points, requiring that there be appropriate quality assurance processes and standards at each exit level.
6. In terms of the composition of the curriculum, is it appropriate? Should it focus on internships/apprenticeship? It was agreed that work-integrated learning should not be compulsory as a component of the curriculum. However, it was argued that the practical component of the qualification should be more clearly defined. The qualifications of the staff at the FET colleges and their ability to transfer practical skills and knowledge were said to need consideration as well.
7. Experience has shown that a serious shortcoming in the colleges is the absence of career guidance to the learners in terms of subject selection with employment aspirations.
8. The articulation pathway remains a contested space, given the autonomy of higher education institutions.

#### *Recommendations of the NCV Review MTT in relation to RPL*

In conclusion, four RPL-related recommendations are made:

1. The practice of recognising prior learning should be implemented both in respect of access to, and in order to obtain credit bearing exemption from, specific modules in the NCV.
2. Recognition should be applied in respect both of formal credits obtained in another environment, and for skills acquired in the workplace.
3. A rigorous RPL policy and/or regulation must be developed that reflects the aim, purpose and application of the national goals in terms of RPL in the NCV qualification.
4. Consideration should be given to a centralised RPL office to handle all RPL applications for the NCV. This would ensure optimal standardisation and mitigate against capacity and skills constraints that may pertain in the FET colleges.

#### *5.3.5.5 Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences*

Amid concerns that the human and social sciences are in decline, an MTT was established to develop a *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences* in order to revitalise this area. In terms of RPL, a key recommendation of that MTT is the suggestion of the formation of a National Centre for Lifelong Education and Educational Opportunities (DHET 2011b), with the task team noting that “failure to acknowledge experiential learning and to implement formal systems for the recognition of prior learning remains a serious blockage in the lives of our potential scholars” (DHET 2011b: 19). The focus of this proposed centre was to be at the nexus of the FET and higher education bands. The report (DHET 2011b: 19–20) proposed that such a centre could:

- Monitor unemployed graduates (across the spectrum of matriculants, FET colleges and higher education);

- Address the gap between the FET and higher education systems;
- “Facilitate, support and drive existing and new initiatives towards the provision of ‘matriculation equivalents’ in education and training”, including exposure to appropriate workplace learning at all levels;
- Support both the national RPL strategy and CAT initiatives; and
- Research and monitor internship programmes at all levels (FET and higher education and training at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels).

It should be noted, however, that the Minister chose not to act on the recommendation for the setting up of the National Centre for Lifelong Education and Educational Opportunities. According to the director for special projects in the Ministry, the Minister feels that the recommendation is well articulated in the Green Paper, and may well find better expression through other initiatives, such as SAIVCET. The RPL MTT notes that some of the recommendations in relation to the proposed national centre could form part of the scope of work of the proposed RPL institute.

### 5.3.6 The DPSA’s draft RPL policy

The DPSA has developed a draft national RPL policy for the public sector (DPSA 2011) – a significant step in terms of state support for RPL. The original drivers were the White Paper on Public Service Training and Education (South African Government Information 1997), SAQA policies, and the NSDS III (DHET 2011a).

Taking its cue from earlier SAQA policies and the broader RPL literature, the draft national policy, which is currently under review in the light of evolving SAQA policy:

- Identifies that a single model of RPL is not viable;
- Recommends a centralised, national RPL institute to broker the implementation of models of RPL through a range of external service providers;
- Outlines the functions of multiple role-players (including departmental RPL “champions”);
- Locates RPL in “pillar 1” of the overall HRD strategy (i.e. “capacity development”);
- Recognises the importance of not promoting “unrealistic expectations” in terms of RPL;
- Sees RPL as one of a wide range of options for building capacity;
- Embraces the knowledge and pedagogical dimensions of RPL;
- Accepts that RPL can be complex, “contentious” and power laden;
- Builds in study leave and bursaries for RPL candidates; and
- Acknowledges the attention needed for multilingualism, and understands that many of the international (and South African) approaches to RPL are “immensely difficult for a lowly educated (or non-educated), non-administratively inclined employee from a non-English speaking background” (DPSA 2011: 24), and that “extensive support” is required.

## 5.4 Key legislative and policy issues

### 5.4.1 The legal environment in international contexts

Drawing on the literature presented in Chapter 2, as well as the French case study in Section 5.1, it seems that policy and legal environments, internationally, are generally enabling of RPL; without them attempts at RPL tend to flounder in the face of unanticipated blockages. National policies allow decentralised/devolved implementation and with a mix of national, regional and partnership funding. In many contexts RPL has arisen out of existing practices and policies: for example, legal provisions for engineers in France; for adults to access trade tests and higher education in Norway; a statutory right to have prior learning documented in Norway and The Netherlands; a universal right to free primary and secondary education via RPL in Norway; and an ‘informal’ right to the same in The Netherlands. We can therefore conclude that policy and legal environments are generally enabling of RPL.

The French legislation, which makes RPL a right for all citizens, must be understood in its socio-historical context. It builds on legislation on ‘continuous learning’ in 1972, which has given adults the right to access learning throughout their lives. A question is whether there should be ‘umbrella’ legislation, which spells out the philosophy and approach to lifelong learning for citizens and provides the framework for specific provision for RPL; this is a very important question and calls for further investigation, as RPL needs to be located within a *family of related issues* that enhances a culture of learning in the society.

### 5.4.2 Legislative issues in South Africa

This brief overview of legislation in South Africa that could have an impact on the application of RPL in mainstream education and training shows that, in principle, RPL could be conducted widely within the current education and training system; both the legislative and overarching policy frameworks support this. There are barriers to RPL implementation, in some cases emanating from contradictions and ambiguities in the legislation, and these have been highlighted in the current overview. None of these barriers are of such a nature that they cannot be addressed, but they will require further research, and a systemic and coherent approach to dealing with them.

## Chapter 6: Analysis, principles and recommendations

This chapter pulls together key issues from Chapters 2–5, and distils a set of principles and recommendations that underpin the National RPL Implementation Strategy as proposed in Chapter 7. These principles and recommendations are embedded in the analysis below, and have been highlighted in bold for ease of reference.

### 6.1 The legal environment

#### 6.1.1 The law

Werquin (2012) makes the argument that the law for RPL should not be part of the law on the NQF, because there is a clear conceptual difference between a qualifications framework and a recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes system. The qualifications framework classifies the qualifications awarded after an assessment; the RPL system aims at assessing these learning outcomes. In other words, the qualifications classified in the NQF are outcomes, whereas RPL is a process.

Moreover, the actors<sup>19</sup> and stakeholders involved in the RPL process are different from those involved in the NQF; the objectives for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes are different; there are different standards for different types of learning outcomes; and the points on which a law should focus for legal formalisation and for providing a vision are different. There are commonalities between RPL and a qualifications framework but passing a law describing both systems, and overly describing the role and responsibilities of too many of the actors and stakeholders, may create unnecessary complexities and rigidities. For example, if the legislation about RPL is tied to the NQF, it may well be that some objectives are out of reach for participants, because of excessive complexity or because the practical arrangements are not provided. Although a set of guidelines, with examples, has been set out to facilitate the work of RPL practitioners, these are not a legislative text, and it would have been easier to limit the number of actors from the beginning.

As a general rule, a rather flexible law, with a lot of room for manoeuvring when implementing the law, protects the small players against a possible hegemony – chosen or de facto – by the bigger partner such as the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour.

The question is whether the new legislation South Africa is considering should be a global law, or whether different objectives should be met with different legislative arrangements.

---

<sup>19</sup> When the objective is a qualification, the main actors are assessors and, to some extent, teachers. When the objective is finding a job, the main actors are employers.

A law that promotes a lifelong learning philosophy and approach could provide an umbrella for more specific RPL legislation. This could be linked to inter-ministerial commitments and an inter-ministerial agency. This will need further exploration.

For obvious historical reasons, South Africa has used as many options as possible to redress the inequities of apartheid, and RPL has been one of them (Gunning et al. 2008). The question is whether RPL is the appropriate tool for achieving such a societal goal.

Another point is that the first legislative text necessary in a country planning an RPL system must be about the currency of the credits awarded in the context of validating and recognising prior learning, because it is the only component that matters to everybody in the country. The point of having a law is to make the possibility of applying for RPL a right for every citizen, and to promote compliance by education institutions; but the challenge is for the law to reach lay people. The right communication is essential – of information, advice and guidance – and ought to be organised so that it reaches everyone, and meets the needs and expectations of all.

- **There should be some form of legislation, and as many end users as possible need to be involved in the preparation of the legislation. End users – such as employers, trade unionists, educators, learners and professional bodies – develop a sense of ownership early in the process if they are involved from the beginning.**

This would not only facilitate the acceptance of qualifications that come from RPL, but is also a way to help communicate to the wider world the value of qualifications awarded after an RPL process. Societal recognition is highly dependent on the currency of the qualifications awarded after an RPL process. This currency is itself highly dependent on how well it is known by many people. Employers and other end users are key players to communicate about RPL.

### **6.1.2 Inter-ministerial collaboration**

- **High-level inter-ministerial and inter-departmental collaboration is required for developing and sustaining RPL.**

Such high-level collaboration would especially need to be between the Ministries and Departments of Basic Education, Higher Education and Training, and Labour, but also not limited to these; that is to say, not confined to education and training but including also health, public administration, social services and other appropriate departments. This is particularly necessary if RPL is to be fully understood and facilitated by social partners to impact on employment and workplace practices. The Netherlands is the best example of

inter-ministerial collaboration, where six ministries are involved in the Learning and Work initiative.

### 6.1.3 Creating an enabling environment for RPL

It is important not to conflate RPL with all the other system building that needs to take place. RPL is not a shorthand term for things like articulation, the development of learning and career pathways, CAT, and the capacitation of the FET sector. RPL is a member of a family of lifelong learning issues that are mutually interdependent. These things need to happen in and of themselves and they will greatly facilitate RPL when they are in place, although in some instances system developments and RPL will take place in tandem.

- **Systemic change is *necessary* in order for RPL to develop and thrive.**

RPL and systemic change are mutually sustaining rather than conflated or separate. Although RPL can support changes, a critical mass of facilitative and conducive conditions needs already to be in place.

- **Thus, detailed auditing of any context introducing RPL needs to be undertaken prior to embarking on the design of a process. Suitably ambitious targets also need to be set to encourage the take up of RPL.**

It is recommended that RPL be aligned to key goals being articulated in a range of documents, including SAQA's recent and forthcoming publications on RPL, current ANC policy documents, the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training, and the *Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences*.

## 6.2 The role of history and culture in shaping RPL

All the case studies show that cultural systems and political contexts shape the way RPL has been implemented internationally, and continue to shape the nature of practice and attitudes towards RPL.

The problems that have faced RPL in South African higher education and training have been sociological rather than technical, related to a cultural history in which only the select few have had access to higher education, and contested relationships between communities of practice and the differences between academic and 'everyday' knowledge. On the one hand, there has been substantive, sustained scholarship concerning the differences in academic and non-academic communities of knowledge; the effectiveness of RPL as a pedagogical device; and the need to attend to issues of epistemological access. On the other

hand, however, the relative lack of academic literacy and formal theory among workplace practitioners, confluences of knowledge that are difficult to categorise in disciplinary and/or academic terms, and other differences have made many South African academics wary of RPL.

- **Research is an essential part of building an RPL system – not only to monitor and evaluate what is occurring but also to build the scholarship in the field.**

### 6.3 RPL providers/centres

RPL centres may have a much broader focus than only RPL, and could provide a range of services, including career guidance, continuing education and work-based learning opportunities using an integrated and holistic approach. International and local literature emphasises the importance of career guidance for adults at different levels and places in the overall system; for example, at national, regional, sectoral and institutional levels. It may be the case that currently fragmented guidance facilities could be networked more effectively, including the SAQA Career Advice Helpline. Again, this is potentially an inter-ministerial concern, as adults need guidance that is well coordinated with labour market intelligence. The literature shows that guidance is a large part of RPL, including formative and diagnostic activities to help people make choices about options and pathways that may be open to them. These functions of RPL would work most effectively in conjunction with a national guidance service.

- **Effective delivery systems for RPL could be through regional and local centres, in the form of assessment centres, skills centres, partner associations between education institutions, and ‘one-stop shops’, where multiple stakeholders work together in providing a range of services for RPL provision and for sharing knowledge and expertise.**

While some RPL centres in the literature are stand-alone, many regional and local RPL centres and access points are co-located with existing organisations, such as higher education institutions, job centres, colleges, employment contexts, third-sector organisations, local government associations, private organisations, VET centres of expertise, and upper secondary schools.

- **An important point is that regionalisation supports differentiation of services offered, meeting different needs in different regional contexts.**

As well as RPL in relation to formal education, training and employment, attention needs to be paid to the NGOs that have offered (and continue to offer) outstanding adult education



and youth development programmes. These could be a real asset to the roll out of RPL, especially linked to the informal sector.

## 6.4 Purposes of RPL

RPL is central to recognising the skills that exist in the workplace, creating learning pathways where gaps exist, and distinguishing a true 'skills gap' from what is better understood as a 'recognition gap'.

- **It is important to recognise that RPL is not a substitute for education and training.**
- **A caution is that where RPL is implemented within an NQF, this can mainstream and orient RPL to 'employability' and 'efficiency' agenda. NQFs exert twin influences on RPL: mainstreaming and formalising RPL policy and practice on the one hand while, on the other, tending to reconfigure its social meanings away from a social justice/redress, social purpose adult education orientation.**

Theorists such as Michelson (1999) draw attention to the cultural dimensions of knowledge and RPL.

- **It is necessary to recognise cultural forms of knowledge, for social justice and equity, and ensure it is inherent in RPL. So, in addition to assessing and recognising knowledge and skills that can be applied to a formal vocational qualification, we need also to consider how to relate cultural knowledge to those qualifications, to engage the ways in which new learning is blocked by internalised oppression, and to contribute to cultural renewal and self-worth. It needs to be recognised that, in fields such as social services and health services, culturally relevant knowledge *is* an aspect of professional competence.**

## 6.5 Different approaches to RPL for different purposes

- **Youth require a developmental approach to RPL that assesses their *potential* as well as their current knowledge and skills; adults have similar needs but generally richer sources of prior learning upon which to draw. It is also the case that learning programmes designed for the two groups may differ.**

Making part qualifications available through RPL may stimulate early school-leavers to return to education and training.

- **RPL in employment is different from RPL in education and training.**

RPL in employment needs to be predicated on good social partner relations, including collective sector agreements for education and training, and incentives to encourage employers to participate in workplace RPL. RPL in education and training contexts requires the smoothing out of inconsistencies where certain qualifications do not allow access to further learning; institutional articulation partnerships based on curricular reviews; possible new qualifications to meet new demands and needs; focused bridging programmes to take account of gaps in areas such as maths and science; mapping job classifications to course offerings and standards to actual workplace practice; credit rating of employer programmes, including compacts between colleges and workplaces to prepare people for specific jobs; and links to local communities, NGOs and businesses.

- **Approaches to RPL should have strong formative, diagnostic and developmental dimensions, as well as the increasingly common summative approaches. Adult pedagogical approaches are favoured.**

The trends in RPL are towards learning conversations, competence conversations and professional dialogues; although more conventional, 'visible' and inductive pedagogies are also required. The ubiquitous individualised 'matching' of prior learning against whatever standards pertain in an environment should be avoided, in favour of mediated approaches where individuals participating in RPL are supported by peers and practitioners. It is important to remember that highly individualised RPL processes pass responsibility for success or failure to the individual and dilute their political, social, economic and organisational determinants. South African RPL cannot be about deficit.

## 6.6 An RPL institute

It is vital that RPL be embedded in appropriate system changes at appropriate times.

- **If RPL becomes mandatory, a centralised RPL institute would be well positioned to act on that mandate across industry, education and training, and community development sectors. Stakeholder groups would need to be consulted as to RPL policy implementation, if they were to buy in to the process, and should be formally connected to the institute through a strong advisory structure.**
- **A centralised RPL institute would need to be adequately resourced and staffed by RPL experts with knowledge of the diverse sectors, working in collaboration with SAQA, the quality councils, and the DHET, and able to interface with other major strategic initiatives. Such an institute should have both operational and professional**

**responsibilities; that is, able to initiate, fund, direct, support, evaluate, advocate and recommend strategic RPL projects and, at the same time, through cooperative arrangements, make sure that viable and effective RPL is part of the implementation of other, related projects and initiatives.**

The development of an RPL institute would need to be consistent with other proposed plans to bring greater organisation and effectiveness to education and training, such as the creation of a network of CETCs, the proposed SAIVET and the renewed role of the SETAs in improving “the match between education and training supply and demand” (DHET 2012d: 62). An RPL institute could ensure that quality RPL policies and practices were built into initial conceptualisations, implementation plans, funding arrangements and staffing models.

- **The RPL institute would need to be overseen by a reference group and governance structure that includes RPL experts from the major stakeholder groups, including organised business, organised labour, the public sector, SAQA and the SETAs, and the quality councils. The RPL institute would thus be both state driven and stakeholder driven, and engage RPL as a contested practice, in which the interests of workers, industry, education institutions, and the state do not always coincide.**

Some of the roles that should be performed by an RPL institute would be the following:

- Directed and commissioned research.
- Programme development and management.
- Development and management of RPL processes within broader strategic initiatives.
- Capacity building in previously under-resourced sectors, such as the trade unions.
- Advocacy.
- Articulation of, support for, and dissemination of leading practices.
- Formative and summative evaluation of RPL and RPL-related projects, including developing capacity for internal monitoring and evaluation processes, and encouraging peer review of processes.
- **The proposed RPL institute would need to initiate a series of strategic projects that can quickly go to scale.**

Michelson (2012) provides several examples of such possible strategies. One is to locate a large, strategically placed, state- and stakeholder-driven RPL/skills development project in a major industrial sector aligned with national economic and social agendas; for example, in construction, engineering or the auto sector. Another large, strategically placed, state- and stakeholder-driven RPL/skills development project could be located in a major public sector; for example, in a parks or other ecological/environmental sector, which could allow research to focus significantly on informal horticultural knowledge, environmental traditions, and indigenous knowledge systems. In addition, an RPL and professional

development project built on the principles of learner-centred, flexible curriculum could be piloted in FET and/or higher education and training.

## 6.7 Professionalisation of RPL

- **The professional development of RPL practitioners is crucial in the South African context, because of a shortage of experience and expertise to drive RPL directly, and there will be a need to train professionals and place continuing emphasis on sharing practices. This needs to go far beyond current assessor training unit standards and the like.**

International practice suggests taking graduates from cognate areas that also have adult education professional expertise. Other workable possibilities include introducing RPL modules into bachelor and masters degree programmes in the broad ETDP area, especially for FET and higher education lecturers. The creation of a masters degree in guidance may be an option, if it does not currently exist. It could relate, for example, to the postgraduate diploma on NQFs and lifelong learning that is being developed by SAQA and UWC.

- **Professional programmes cannot simply focus on RPL as a technical procedure; they must address epistemological and pedagogical issues, cultural dimensions of knowledge, and labour market and employment aspects of RPL.**

There will be a real need for multilingual practitioners, and bursary support will probably be required to make this a reality, as well as good salaries for the profession as a whole.

## 6.8 What the South African RPL system should aspire to

Within a general philosophy and approach to lifelong learning, a national system of RPL will best develop from well-targeted, differentiated, bottom-up initiatives where a critical mass of enabling factors exist or are in the pipeline, for example: a sound legal framework; well-functioning SETAs; progressive employers in the private and public sectors; active trade unions; committed professional bodies; growing industrial sectors; workforces that include various bands of professional, technical and artisanal workers with pathways between them; partnerships or memoranda of agreement between education and training institutions that address learning pathways and progression opportunities; networks of NGOs and so on.

- **Timely and focused initiatives that can gradually expand and are careful to identify industry needs are both cost effective and more likely to produce results, especially if**

**they are conducted on an action research basis. While international literature suggests regional and multi-agency delivery systems, these may not be appropriate in the short term in South Africa, although the geographical location of projects will be an important consideration.**

Several interrelated possibilities for specific initiatives include the following:

- RPL for adults with work experience who left school relatively early with or without qualifications.
- RPL for employees in companies who could benefit from a further or higher education programme in partnership with the employer/industry.
- RPL for adults in relation to the NASCA.
- RPL for out-of-school youth and adults with experience in the informal sector linked to enterprise development and relevant stakeholders in the labour market.
- RPL at the interface between adult education and training, FET and sponsored pathways for labour market entry.
- RPL that takes account of the articulation gap between unskilled and semi-skilled and between semi-skilled and intermediate-level skilling.
- RPL at NQF Level 4 and below and in relation to revised NCV and FET offerings more generally.
- RPL linked to development objectives, community-based essential skills upgrading programmes and social entrepreneurship.
- RPL in health and social care; for example, community health workers where there is a pressing need for 'cohort' rather than individualised RPL.
- RPL in relation to trade tests and pre-trade tests.
- **RPL needs to align with related social, cultural, economic and political goals.**

Such related social, cultural, economic and political goals include the following:

- The development of the FET sector, including the upgrading of FET lecturer qualifications and the creation of innovative curricula.
- Addressing both the skills gap and the recognition gap.
- Revitalising the humanities and social sciences.
- Affirming alternative knowledges and parity of esteem in the context of individual and community development. Projects might be formulated that require SETAs and education institutions to explore the use of indigenous, workers' and other 'outsider' knowledges in workplace, community and environmental contexts, and to conceptualise knowledge and skill outside of Eurocentric and technicist paradigms. The importance of this is both economic and cultural. On the one hand, RPL can help identify the skills base for alternative forms of economic and ecological development; on the other, it can be part of the development of individual and collective epistemological self-esteem.

## 6.9 Costs and proposed funding models for RPL in South Africa

Given the realities of South Africa's current social and economic context, the possibility of RPL being able to grow under a 'user pays' approach is almost non-existent. Equally, given the pressures of the development agenda in South Africa, any new fiscus contributions from Treasury are unlikely.

- **In considering the funding of RPL, a largely state and employer funding approach will be necessary, at least in the short to medium terms. It will therefore be critical to consider a diversified funding approach that draws on existing funding sources and streams that are sector/sub-sector specific, and to pull these together in ways that are more coherent, focused, integrated and streamlined.**

## 6.10 Further research on funding and costing

Depending on which models and aspects of funding as proposed by the MTT are accepted, some costing of the proposed system and its medium- and long-term implications should be undertaken in the light of the envisaged growth of the system, say for the next 10 years. This will assist the DHET in its negotiations on the budget for RPL.

## Chapter 7: National RPL Implementation strategy<sup>20</sup>

### 7.1 Background

#### 7.1.1 South Africa's socio-economic context and RPL

There appears to be a disjuncture between the development of knowledge, skills and competencies (supply-side education issues) and the labour market (the demand side), despite a highly sophisticated skills development strategy. Key South African economic policy documents emphasise the need to expand economic growth in a context of, on the one hand, inadequate supply of intermediate and high-level skills in key sectors and, on the other, increasing pressures for poverty eradication and service delivery to communities by the state. South Africa continues to have high levels of poverty and unemployment, with income inequality widening for the poor.

One important dimension of the context described above is that of unemployed youth. The research findings released by the Centre for Higher Education Transformation paint a very bleak picture, of youth unemployment and potential social instability (Cloete 2009). The report indicates that, based on 2007 statistics, just over 2.8 million 18- to 24-year-olds in South Africa were not in employment or in education and training (the so-called "NEETs"). Of these, just over 990,000 would have completed Grade 10 or 11, just over half a million had secondary education less than Grade 10 or primary education only, and nearly 600,000 had matric or equivalent but without a university exemption (Cloete 2009: 10). The different groups of 18- to 24-year-olds without a senior school-leaving certificate made up a staggering 2 million in 2007. Furthermore, it is estimated that each year approximately half a million young people join the category of youth not in employment or education and training.

It is in this context that a holistic approach to a national human resources development strategy, that includes the development of a culture of lifelong learning, becomes critical. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) should be seen as a key feature of a lifelong learning system, alongside a range of related strategies, mechanisms and education and training opportunities.

---

<sup>20</sup> The Ministerial Task Team has designed and structured this chapter in such a way that it could become a stand-alone National Implementation Strategy.

### 7.1.2 The development of RPL in South Africa

Between 2002 and 2004, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) developed a national RPL policy and implementation guidelines. The period during and after the development and publication of the SAQA RPL policy and guidelines saw a variety of sub-sector policy development and pilot implementation projects. However, these activities were not sufficient to embed RPL implementation on a wide scale.

During 2007, South Africa participated in a 22-country study on recognising informal and non-formal learning. The *Country Note for South Africa* (Gunning et al. 2008) states that ...the legislative and policy-based connection between recognition of non-formal and informal learning and redress remains strong, the strength of advocacy of recognition of non-formal and informal learning by government, other stakeholders and providers is variable, and the widespread availability of high-quality, accessible recognition services has not reached many for whom it was intended, particularly individuals who do have knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through years of work and other life experience. The review team found commendable practice in individual providers – “islands of good practice” – but was concerned to find that practitioners were isolated. (Gunning et al. 2008: 23)

In 2008, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) review process culminated in the promulgation of the NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008). In addition, 2009 saw the establishment of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), with the DHET taking over the skills development functions from the Department of Labour, resulting in changes to the skills development framework and structures (e.g. the establishment of a third quality council: the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, or QCTO).

As a result of these structural and policy changes, RPL has been moved to a more central space. For example, the DHET’s *Revised Strategic Plan for 2010/11–2014/15* (2011b) indicates that

The strategic vision for RPL is that it will become a fully integrated, universally accepted mechanism, allied with education and training provision, to permit optimum utilisation of knowledge and skills acquired by South Africans outside the conventional channels of institutional and workplace learning. (DHET 2011b: 34–35)

In 2010, SAQA began the conceptual and planning work “as part of a national strategy towards developing a fully-fledged RPL system in the country” (SAQA 2011a: 1), as part of its mandate to develop an overarching RPL policy that should in turn guide the development of the RPL policies of the three quality councils. As part of its RPL activities, SAQA organised a national RPL conference “Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice”, which took place on 23–25 February 2011.



The SAQA RPL conference acknowledged the poor implementation of RPL since 2002 and culminated in a resolution and working document on RPL (SAQA 2011b). The resolutions included, among others, the following:

- That a national RPL strategy should be developed; and
- That a Ministerial Task Team (MTT) for RPL was needed.

Following the 2011 RPL conference, SAQA established a reference group to undertake a review of the national RPL policy (that work is under way). The SAQA RPL reference group and the RPL MTT are working closely to ensure that the revised national RPL policy and the National RPL Implementation Strategy are closely aligned.

It is the task team's view that a national RPL policy alone cannot drive RPL implementation, and that the *laissez faire* approach that was adopted meant that RPL was not taken seriously in a context where there were no incentives to implement and embed RPL in the education and training system.

## 7.2 Vision for RPL implementation

In South Africa, RPL carries particular significance, as it is central to an inclusive, democratic education and training system. It is part of a national drive to build a learning culture in every family, village, township and city.

The vision is to challenge conventional knowledge hierarchies, in the interests of widening access to lifelong learning opportunities for adults who can contribute to the production of new knowledge, in the interests of social, economic and environmental justice and sustainability.

RPL has a dual purpose: on the one hand, social justice; and, on the other, access to opportunities for lifelong learning to enhance economic, environmental, social and personal development.

RPL is emancipatory in that it provides opportunities:

- For those unfairly denied these opportunities in the past;
- For reducing inequalities in society that are based on privileging certain forms of knowledge over others;
- For people to be formally recognised and honoured for what they already know; and
- For people to participate in the formal economy and contribute to society through creative and meaningful work.

RPL provides access to lifelong learning opportunities and to the global knowledge economy:

- Through an education and training system that enables articulation and mobility within and across different pathways;
- Through alternative routes to formal education and training; and
- Through skills development.

Although efforts to integrate RPL principles into the design and delivery of qualifications and programmes over the past 15 years have been relatively few, fruitful lessons have been learnt:

- Firstly, it has been shown that RPL can succeed in its purposes through appropriate and credible teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Secondly, these successes help to restore confidence in the national learning system and in its capacity to engage with cultures of knowledge and learning that characterise the struggle for survival and transformation in many marginalised communities.
- Thirdly, while acknowledging the complex relationships between different forms of knowledge and their associated learning pathways, 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.
- Finally, 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'.

The vision for an RPL strategy in South Africa is guided by the above principles, and the lessons learnt.

However, for RPL to be fully realised as part of a democratic learning system, it needs to be given concrete expression in the policies and practices of education and training providers and practitioners, and these must be properly resourced. Statutory bodies, quality councils, and public and private providers at all levels in the system must be supported in building the capacity to provide and sustain quality RPL programmes and services where they are most needed.

The role of RPL, in providing alternative routes of access to further and higher education and training programmes, is vital in the promotion and delivery of a national 'returning to learning' strategy for unemployed and under-qualified youth and adults. It is pivotal to building a learning nation.

## 7.3 Rationale (key issues and recommendations)

The National RPL Implementation Strategy acknowledges that RPL is part of the larger education and training system and that other parts of the system will impact on the success of RPL implementation.

Based on the evidence provided by the various reviews produced during the course of the RPL MTT's work, the task team is recommending the following principles as being critical to embedding RPL within the broad education, training and development sector over the next 5–10 years:

### 7.3.1 A national RPL institute

The task team strongly recommends that a 'driver' and coordinating mechanism, in the form of an RPL institute, be established. However, the task team recommends a two-stage process for the establishment of an RPL institute because:

- Of the urgency of establishing such an institute;
- There are no existing legal mechanisms for establishing such an institute; and
- The processes required to legislate the establishment of a new institute would mean that a fully functioning institute would take 3–5 years to come into being.

The first phase, of 3–5 years, would see the institute being attached to an existing, functional, non-sectoral organisation such as SAQA as a special project or similar, in order to ensure a reasonably speedy start-up phase. It would be staffed and run as a semi-independent institute, but (assuming it was located in SAQA) it would fall under SAQA's governance system; that is, a SAQA Board sub-committee would be established to oversee the institute. During this phase, work would be undertaken to develop a process to establish the institute as a legislated entity. The second phase would see the institute moving from SAQA (or wherever it was located) to being a legislated, independent entity.

The 'institute' would be funded separately from SAQA (see funding recommendations below) in the first phase. The roles to be performed by such an institute would include the following:

- Directing and commissioning research – from the national/systemic level (including ongoing research into barriers to RPL implementation and participation), to the development of case studies (within economic sectors and sub-sectors, and within and across different institutional types), and the examination of new technologies that support adult learning – in order to support implementation and improved practice.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> The purpose of the proposed RPL institute is not to develop *homogenised* structures, policies, procedures and practices across institutions and sectors, but rather to support the internal development of contextual, institutional, sectoral and site-based appropriate RPL practices.

- Developing and managing programme and project, especially strategic and research projects.
- Engaging in various processes and forums that may impact on RPL implementation, including being part of relevant policy development processes.
- Developing and managing RPL processes within broader strategic initiatives (such as strengthening RPL within existing career advising services, or within open and distance learning processes).
- Developing and maintaining a national database of RPL providers and practitioners.
- Capacity building across the system, including:
  - Working with the quality councils to develop and/or strengthen criteria and processes for accrediting RPL providers and practitioners;
  - Establishing a process to develop RPL components within relevant qualifications and part qualifications; and
  - In previously under-resourced sectors, such as the trade unions.
- Playing a strong advocacy and support role, including arranging workshops and seminars and a regular national RPL conference.
- Maintaining links and networks with the international RPL community and related developments.
- Articulating, supporting and disseminating leading practices, including establishing an RPL clearinghouse that would house and, if necessary, develop RPL resources (including advising and assessment resources).
- Undertaking formative and summative evaluation of RPL and RPL-related projects, including developing capacity for internal monitoring and evaluation processes, and encouraging peer review of processes.

The institute would be mindful of the legislative mandates of various statutory bodies, such as SAQA and the quality councils. However, in building collaborative practices (e.g. through developing communities of practice), the institute would need to have the authority to ensure that RPL implementation is facilitated and could take place optimally.

### **7.3.2 A state- and employer-driven funding and resourcing model**

The recommendations of the RPL MTT, which should be read in the context of Section 7.1.1 above, are based on the principle that no *new* contributions from the fiscus would be necessary. Rather, the funding and resourcing model is based on making optimal use of what already exists.

Given that RPL is generally expensive, and that it is difficult to quantify the costs precisely, the recommendation of the MTT is that the first phase of the institute's existence and its activities be primarily state funded, given the current and forecasted national economic and

social development agenda of government, which includes a strong focus on poverty reduction (context as set out in Section 7.1.1 above).

A reduced role for state funding of RPL should be examined towards the end of the institute's first phase. At that stage – if user fees are perhaps introduced – one variation would be to consider making RPL progressively free for the poor and placing a limit on the number of times an individual may access state support for RPL.

The first principle adopted by the task team is that the state funding sources should be diversified, while using funding streams that already exist, and that these should as far as possible be sub-sector specific. The second principle is that the state should invest in setting up the system and the accompanying infrastructure.

#### *Further education and training, and higher education*

The task team recommends that the higher education funding formula (currently being reviewed by a Ministerial Task Team) be structured to include funding for RPL programmes as part of the funding for foundation programmes (as one example), especially for adults seeking access to higher education programmes at whatever level. It is important that the final funding formula take into account innovative approaches to the funding of RPL within higher education.

A similar approach should be adopted for the further education and training (FET) sector.

#### *QCTO, SETAs and workplaces in terms of the levy grant system*

The Sector Education and Training Authority-focused research that was reported on in Chapter 3 of the current RPL MTT report indicates that many SETAs are already spending considerable resources on RPL, although these efforts are not being reflected in RPL learner achievements. The MTT recommends a number of interrelated strategies with regard to the levy grants system:

- Amend the mandatory grants system (through the workplace skills plans and workplace training systems) to include RPL advising and assessment processes as a valid equivalent to undertaking a learning and/or skills programme. The QCTO and SETAs would be required to develop and provide the necessary information and support to allow this to happen.
- Consider tax rebates to employers who undertake RPL for employed workers, over and above the workplace skills plan (WSP) processes/mandatory grant.
- Use the discretionary grants system to support identified key and/or strategic projects in all sectors, using the SETAs as the sectoral coordinating mechanism.
- Direct a portion of all SETAs' discretionary funds to the RPL institute, to support core and cross-cutting activities, given that SETAs are already spending considerable funds on RPL, but without sufficient impact.

- Encourage the National Skills Fund (NSF), which was designed to support national projects, to view RPL as a national project and therefore to contribute a portion of its funds to the core and cross-cutting activities of the RPL institute, given that some activities would contribute to the development of sub-sectors that would not fall under the above funding activities.

### *Key and strategic implementation projects*

The task team strongly recommends that sectoral and provincial/regional RPL initiatives be driven through identified key and/or strategic (catalytic) projects. Such project would be scoped and funded outside of the above sources, through funding proposals that would target multiple sources (e.g. the NSF), participating public and private sector entities, and donor funding (see below for recommendations regarding the project-driven approach).

In addition, the institute should manage a small system of grant funds to be allocated for successful proposals, to allow for innovative initiatives to be undertaken; this would include, for example, seed funding to establish regional or shared RPL centres.

### **7.3.3 Implementation strategy driven by key and strategic projects**

As mentioned in the previous section, the task team recommends that key and strategic national projects be identified to run parallel to cross-cutting activities such as advocacy and capacity development, so that RPL achievements are built into the work of the RPL institute from the outset.

Initial suggested projects include the following:

- The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (Palama) to support the implementation of an RPL policy and strategy across the public sector.
- A focus on the Community Development RPL project initiated by the Department of Social Development and SAQA.<sup>22</sup>
- Supporting the current initiative to RPL artisan aides.<sup>23</sup>
- Developing a rural project in the agricultural sector that includes aspects of community development, indigenous knowledge and food security.
- Consider a process to provide for regional projects, hubs or centres.

---

<sup>22</sup> The Task Team received a written request from the director general of the Department of Social Development requesting that it recommend this project as part of its broader recommendation to identify and support key national projects.

<sup>23</sup> A suggestion from one of the submissions received, that the NAMB (National Artisan Moderation Board) and the HRDC-SA ATD-TTT (Human Resources Development Council of South Africa Artisan and Technician Development Technical Task Team) might wish to consider, is the direct cost, to the user, of the trade test, which apparently prevents access on the part of poorer workers to both the necessary pre-test training and the assessment component. A further recommendation is that the trade test practices and equipment at colleges be audited (presumably with a view to updating equipment to bring it in line with industry standards).

The task team recognises that it will take time to build and diversify the post-school sector in terms of both institutional and qualification/learning programme offerings to cater to a much broader range of cohorts of people – from young school drop-outs to much older potential RPL candidates. The task team also recognises that RPL has its limitations and can only be one part of a range of opportunities and strategies that develop the national system and culture of lifelong learning. For example, RPL is not the mechanism for a second chance at education for those who have dropped out of the formal schooling system at some point, nor can it take the place of ‘second chance’ qualifications or institutions that support these. Thus, alongside the expanded provision of RPL services must be the expansion of local and community-based institutions, as well as concomitant qualifications and learning programmes (to be developed as part of the recommendations of the Ministerial Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres).

Furthermore, bearing in mind the diversity of the cohorts of youth who are not in employment, or education and training (Cloete 2009), as well as the diversity of unemployed or partly employed adults, it is clear that the strategies for both RPL and further learning opportunities need to be diverse and adapted to different contexts, sectors and locations. The task team therefore recommends that it is through the project-driven approach that a multi-dimensional RPL strategy will need to be developed that is context specific and cohort diverse. At the stage of conceptualising each project, it will be the task of the RPL institute and project partners to develop an analysis of potential cohorts and the differentiated strategies that will be required to assist people to access RPL, diagnostic and further development/learning opportunities.

#### **7.3.4 Implementation strategy underpinned by extensive advocacy and capacity development**

It is widely agreed that RPL implementation needs to be supported by a coordinated advocacy and education process, and this must be one of the core tasks of the RPL institute. Part of the work of the RPL institute would be to work with stakeholders and role-players to debunk some of the myths and misconceptions surrounding RPL (such as fears that RPL contributes to the dropping of standards).

Alongside the advocacy strategy is the need for capacitation of the system at all levels. Public and private providers alike, as well as professionals involved in various RPL services, need to be capacitated; however, so do a variety of other role-players and stakeholders, including professional bodies and employers. In this regard, SETAs become critical in supporting the development of good quality RPL in workplaces, and trade unions (which have hitherto been an under-resourced sector) become critical in contributing to the RPL system.

Professionalisation of RPL practitioners is key and must be supported by the development of appropriate qualifications and continuing professional development activities. The definition of 'RPL practitioners' should not be limited to certain kinds of practitioners or professionals, such as only education specialists. However, it should be recognised that all RPL practitioners must meet the criterion of having certain capabilities, such as an understanding of and orientation to adult education theory and practice and so on.

The professionalisation of RPL practitioners could also be attained through the establishment of an RPL Practitioners' Association. It is not intended that such an association be set up by the RPL institute, but rather that the institute would support the establishment of such an association (hopefully with provincial chapters that could support provincial projects), including funding the coming together of RPL practitioners.

### **7.3.5 Incremental quality development of the RPL system**

Not all providers and workplaces can be expected immediately to implement RPL. At the same time, RPL development and implementation cannot be restricted to only the key and strategic projects that will be identified and developed as part of the 10-year plan. Thus, the RPL institute should be able to support (in various ways, including through a system of grant-making/seed-funding) implementation in other project areas, especially projects that have been identified and proposed by stakeholders and role-players.

## **7.4 Overall objective(s)/goal(s)**

The overall objective of this national implementation strategy for RPL is to ensure that over the next 5–10 years RPL will be embedded within the education, training and development sector, with significant improvements in the availability of RPL services across sectors and regions, alongside a significant increase in the numbers of people who have participated in and benefited from RPL processes.

This implementation strategy supports the national RPL policy and assumes that SAQA will periodically revise the RPL policy as necessary.



## **7.5 Cross-cutting and supporting activities and principles**

### **7.5.1 Inter-ministerial/inter-departmental coordinating mechanism and support**

In order to achieve coherence in RPL initiatives it is imperative that state bodies and departments coordinate activities and approaches. In this regard, the DHET, the HRDC-SA and the DPSA and Palama are critical in contributing to the coordination activities of the RPL institute.

### **7.5.2 Extensive buy-in of key role-players and stakeholders**

There needs to be a society-level commitment to RPL, and this needs to be developed through extensive consultation and advocacy, information dissemination, support and capacitation.

### **7.5.3 Legislative and regulatory framework**

The task team recommends that new RPL-specific legislation *not* be developed in the short term, but rather that the RPL institute work with a diversity of role-players and stakeholders to develop buy-in and support, through encouraging communities of practice and trust, in order to expand RPL implementation. The success of such an approach should be part of a review of the RPL institute in the first five years; and part of such a review would be to determine whether legislation is required at that point. Part of that review could also include whether South Africa should consider similar legislation to France or The Netherlands – this might depend on the level of take up of RPL during the first five years of the RPL institute’s existence, and the kinds of ongoing barriers that may not have been adequately resolved through the strategies recommended in the current implementation strategy.

## **7.6 Objectives, sub-objectives and activities: A high-level action plan**

The task team understands that a process of public engagement will take place once the draft National RPL Implementation Strategy has been gazetted for public comment. Many of the recommendations may change, and objectives, activities, roles and responsibilities will need to be discussed, negotiated and agreed with relevant role-players and stakeholders. In this context, the RPL MMT has developed what it considers to be a high-level action plan, on the understanding that once public comments have been received and the national implementation strategy refined through a deeper consultative process, a more detailed action plan will be developed.

The task team has therefore built in the finalisation of the National RPL Implementation Strategy as the first objective to establishing the mechanisms that will drive the implementation strategy.

### High-level action plan for a National RPL Implementation Strategy

Objectives	Sub-objectives	Activities		
		Short-term (years 1 and 2)	Medium-term (years 3–5)	Long-term (years 6–10)
Finalisation of an implementation strategy through consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake extensive consultation around the recommendations and approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consult with all role-players and stakeholders</li> <li>Establish sub-sector reference groups e.g. for higher education, FET, employers etc.</li> <li>Revise the National RPL Implementation Strategy and ensure buy-in at all stages</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the National RPL Implementation Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regularly review the institute and the strategy</li> </ul>
Establishment of an adequately resourced RPL institute that builds on what exists, advocates, and coordinates initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agree on the coordinating mechanism and its location</li> <li>Agree on and mobilise funding sources</li> <li>Develop and agree on a resourcing plan (including staffing)</li> <li>Establish the RPL institute</li> <li>Set the target of 10% of all learners on programmes to take an RPL route</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a business case for the RPL institute</li> <li>Coordinate meetings and agreements on funding sources</li> <li>Undertake activities as per the business case and action plan to establish the RPL institute</li> <li>Work with key role-players and stakeholders to develop the systems necessary to implement, monitor and report on RPL processes and outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the RPL institute with the possible goal of its becoming a legislated entity</li> <li>Review whether specific RPL legislation is required (e.g. EVC<sup>1</sup> equivalent as currently exists in The Netherlands)</li> </ul>	
Development of the national system through strategic projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify and implement national key and strategic RPL projects</li> <li>Encourage collaboration at provincial and/or regional levels among RPL providers and role-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the development of project proposals and plans, including provincially or regionally based collaborative projects</li> <li>Assist with sourcing funding</li> <li>Support the implementation of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review existing projects and identify new projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review existing projects and identify new projects</li> </ul>

	<p>players and across sectors for enhanced and speedy services to RPL candidates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the systems and processes to disseminate the knowledge, resources and artifacts developed through the projects</li> </ul>	<p>RPL projects, including development of resources for the advising and assessment processes, documentation of all aspects of the project to support the development of case studies, the addition of resources to the clearinghouse database/portal and so on</p>		
Advocacy and capacity development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate advocacy and information strategies and activities with other key role-players and/or sub-sectors e.g. SAQA's Career Advice Helpline</li> <li>• Develop sectoral and partner capacity development strategies and activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop advocacy and information strategies with relevant materials that are appropriate to different sectors and target groups</li> <li>• Work with all stakeholders and role-players to develop sectoral capacity development strategies and activities focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Development and professionalisation of all RPL practitioners, including the development of appropriate qualifications and part qualifications within an articulated qualification and career pathway</li> <li>○ Working with the quality councils to develop criteria for registering/accrediting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On an ongoing basis, review and revise the advocacy strategy and information dissemination</li> <li>• Undertake ongoing capacity development initiatives</li> <li>• Organise annual national sectoral conferences, workshops and seminars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On an ongoing basis, review and revise the advocacy strategy and information dissemination</li> <li>• Undertake ongoing capacity development initiatives</li> <li>• Organise annual national sectoral conferences, workshops and seminars</li> </ul>

		<p>RPL providers, services, programmes and practitioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Development of processes to support capacitation of public and private providers to undertake quality RPL</li> <li>○ Establishment of an RPL Practitioners' Association</li> <li>● Organise annual conferences, seminars, workshops and training events</li> </ul>		
--	--	--	--	--

**Note:** EVC=*Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Competenties* (the equivalent, in Dutch, of RPL)

## 7.5 Roles and responsibilities

Key government departments, statutory bodies, stakeholders and role-players that are crucial to the successful, scaled-up implementation of RPL are identified below. Key principles underpinning their roles and responsibilities include cooperation, collaboration and the development of communities of practice and trust.

### DHET

- Establish and coordinate inter-ministerial and inter-departmental initiatives.

### DPSA/Palama

- Work closely with the RPL institute to develop and implement an RPL process for the public sector, including reviewing their policy to ensure alignment with the national RPL policy if necessary.
- Collaborate with the RPL institute to identify and support RPL projects across other state departments.

### Other state departments

- Contribute to inter-ministerial and inter-departmental processes.
- Undertake RPL projects.

### SAQA, quality councils and SETAs<sup>24</sup>

- Develop overarching and sectoral RPL policies and procedures in collaboration with the RPL institute.
- Work with the RPL institute to develop criteria and procedures for registering and accrediting RPL providers and practitioners.
- Agree on, and implement, the necessary systems – including data collections systems – to report on all aspects of RPL implementation, including RPL candidates and their achievements.
- Contribute to the implementation of RPL in all its aspects.
- SAQA, quality councils and SETAs to ensure that the bodies/organisations they each regulate deliver on their RPL commitments and comply with regulatory requirements.

### Public and private education and training institutions i.e. providers<sup>25</sup>

- Ensure that RPL policies and procedures are in place and publicly available.
- Work with the RPL institute and the DHET to ensure that RPL funding is accessed.

---

<sup>24</sup> These roles and responsibilities should be read in conjunction with the (revised) national RPL policy.

<sup>25</sup> These roles and responsibilities should be read in conjunction with the (revised) national RPL policy.

- Work with the RPL institute to capacitate RPL implementation within and across each institution.
- Implement the necessary systems to report on all aspects of RPL implementation, including RPL candidates and their achievements.

### **Employers**

- Work with SETAs and the RPL institute to build RPL into workplace skills plans and training plans and processes.
- Implement the necessary systems to report on all aspects of RPL implementation, including RPL candidates and their achievements.

### **Trade unions**

- Work with SETAs, the QCTO and the RPL institute to ensure capacitation of union office-bearers and members.

## References

- ANC (African National Congress). 1995. *A policy framework for education and training*. Manzini: Macmillan.
- ANC/COSATU (African National Congress/Congress of South African Trade Unions). 1993. A framework for lifelong learning: A unified, multi-path approach to education and training. Draft discussion document prepared for the National Training Policy Workshop, Johannesburg, 18–20 June.
- Bank SETA. 2011. Report on RPL study trip to The Netherlands. Johannesburg: piCompany.
- Bolton, H. Forthcoming. Introductory note. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Botha, E. Forthcoming. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) intervention within the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector (merSETA). In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Breier, M. 1997. Whose learning? Whose knowledge? Recognition of Prior Learning and the National Qualifications Framework. In D. Bensusan (ed). *Whither the university?* Cape Town: Juta.
- Breier, M. 1999. Faint hope or false promise? The RPL principle of the NQF. In W. Morrow and K. King (eds). *Vision and reality: Changing education and training in South Africa*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Breier, M. 2001. How to bridge the 'great divide': The dilemma for the policy and practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education* 33: 5–26.
- Breier, M. 2003. The recruitment and recognition of prior informal experience in the pedagogy of two university courses in labour law. Doctoral thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Breier, M. 2005. A discipline-specific approach to the recognition of prior informal experience in adult pedagogy: 'rpl' and opposed to 'RPL'. *Studies in Continuing Education* 27(1): 51–65.
- Breier, M. 2008. *The RPL conundrum: Recognition of Prior Learning in a teacher upgrading programme*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.



- Breier, M. 2011. South Africa: Research reflecting critically on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) research and practice. In J. Harris, M. Breier and C. Wihak (eds). *Researching the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Breier M. with Burgess, A. 2003. The implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning at universities and technikons in South Africa. Report on research commissioned by the Joint Education Trust.
- Breier, M. and Osman, R. 2000. Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning at universities and technikons in South Africa. Report on research commissioned by the Joint Education Trust.
- Breier, M. with Ralphs, A. 2010. In search of *phronesis*: Recognising practical wisdom in the Recognition (assessment) of Prior Learning. *British Journal of Sociology in Education* 30(4): 479–493.
- Blom, R., Parker, B. and Keevy, J. 2007. *The recognition of non-formal and informal learning in South Africa: Country background report prepared for the OECD thematic review on recognition of non-formal and informal learning*. Pretoria: South African Qualifications Authority.
- Buchler, M. 2002. *Research on Recognition of Prior Learning leading to the development of a SAQA policy for RPL implementation. Report on international and South African models of RPL implementation*. Johannesburg: JET Education Services.
- Butterworth, C. 1992. More than one bite at the APEL – Contrasting models of accrediting prior learning. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 16(3): 39–51.
- Castle, J. and Atwood, G. 2001. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for access or credit? Problematic issues in a university. *Studies in the Education of Adults* 33(1): 60–72.
- CEPD and BCC (Centre for Education Policy Development and Bronx Community College). 2012. *New linkages: Building college to university pathways*. Proceedings of the conference held on 23 & 24 April 2012 at the Birchwood Hotel and Conference Centre, Boksburg, Gauteng.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2001. *A new academic policy for programmes and qualifications in higher education: Discussion document*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE. 2004a. *Criteria for institutional audits*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE. 2004b. *Criteria for programme accreditation*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE. 2008. *HEQC framework for delegated functions*. Accessed November 2012 from: <http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d000189/>.

- Cloete, N. (ed). 2009. *Responding to the educational needs of post-school youth: Determining the scope of the problem and developing a capacity-building model*. Cape Town: Centre for Higher Education Transformation.
- Cooper, L. 1998. From 'rolling mass action' to 'RPL': The changing discourse of experience and learning in the South African labour movement. *Studies in Continuing Education* 20(2): 143–157.
- Cooper, L. 2005. Towards a theory of pedagogy, learning and knowledge in an 'everyday' context: Case study of a South African trade union. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town.
- Cooper, L. 2006. Tools of mediation: An historical-cultural approach to RPL. In P. Andersson and J. Harris (eds). *Re-theorising the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Cooper, L. with Jones, B. 2011. Models of RPL into postgraduate programmes at UCT. Research report on Phase 1, Specialised Pedagogy, A comparative study of RPL practices within the changing landscape of the NQF in South Africa. SAQA research project.
- Cooper, L. and Jones, B. 2012. Case study: Integration of RPL into the diploma programmes of the Workers' College. SAQA research project.
- COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions). 2000. *Recognition of Prior Learning*. Learning and Work series. Johannesburg: COSATU.
- De Graaf, F. Forthcoming. Evaluation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applicants' knowledge claims towards fourth year study at a university of technology. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Deller, K. 2003. RPL – Why the corporate sector should use it. In *Skills development handbook*. Johannesburg: Cachet Communications.
- Deller, K. 2004. *How to implement RPL in the workplace*. Johannesburg: Knowres Publishing.
- Deller, K. 2007a. Private workplace RPL provision: Barriers and solutions. Paper presented at SAQA Strategic Conversations in Workplace RPL, Cape Town.
- Deller, K. 2007b. Towards the design of a workplace RPL implementation model for the South African insurance sector. PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg.
- Deller, K., Coetzee, J. and Beekman, L. n.d. Towards the design of an implementation model. Unpublished document. Department of Human Resources Management, University of Johannesburg.

- Deller, K. with Ralphs, A. 2012. Relocating RPL practices: The possibilities and constraints of a changing curriculum for occupation and trades qualifications in South Africa. SAQA research project.
- Department of Labour. 2002. *RPL policy document: A strategic framework for implementation*. Pretoria: Department of Labour.
- DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training). 2008. *Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997). Committee of Principals: Requirements and conditions for matriculation endorsement and issuing of certificates of exemption for admission to bachelor's degree studies*. Government Gazette No. 31674, 5 December 2008. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2011a. *National Skills Development Strategy III*. Accessed November 2012 from: <http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=163950>.
- DHET. 2011b. *Report commissioned by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the Charter for Humanities and Social Sciences*. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2011c. *Revised strategic plan for 2010/11-2014/15*. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2011d. *Call for comments on the proposed qualifications sub-frameworks for general and further education and training, higher education, and trades and occupations*. Government Gazette No. 34883, 23 December 2011. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2012a. *Green paper for post-school education and training*. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2012b. *Report of the Ministerial Task Team on Community Education and Training Centres*. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2012c. *Report of the Ministerial Task Team on the Review of the National Certificate Vocational*. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2012d. *Report of the Ministerial Task Team on SETA Performance*. Pretoria: DHET.
- DHET. 2012e. *Determination of the sub-frameworks that comprise the National Qualifications Framework*. Notice 1040, Government Gazette No. 36003, 14 December 2012. Pretoria: DHET.
- DoE (Department of Education). 1995. *White paper on education and training*. Notice 196, 15 March. WPJ/1995. Pretoria: DoE.
- DoE. 1997. *Education white paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education*. Government Gazette No. 18207. Pretoria: DoE.
- DoE. 1998. *Education white paper 4: Programme for the transformation of further education and training*. Notice 2188, 25 September. Government Gazette No. 19281. Pretoria: DoE.

- DoE. 2007. *Higher education qualifications framework*. Government Gazette No. 30353. Pretoria: DoE.
- DPSA (Department of Public Service and Administration). 2011. *Policy and procedure on implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the public service*. Pretoria: DPSA.
- Du Pré, R.H. and Pretorius, K. 2001. *CTP policy on RPL*. Pretoria: Committee of Technikon Principals.
- Evans, E., Guile, D. and Harris, J. 2009. *Putting knowledge to work*. London: WLE Centre, Institute of Education and London Chamber of Commerce and Industry Trust.
- Frick, B., Bitzer, E. and Liebowitz, B. 2007. Implications of variance in ARPL policy: A South African case study. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 21(2): 22–28.
- Gunning, D., Van Kleef, J. and Werquin, P. 2008. *Recognition of non-formal and informal learning: Country note for South Africa*. Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.
- Harris, J. 1996. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa: Drifts and shifts in international practices: Understanding the changing discursive terrain. Paper presented at the International Conference on Experiential Learning, University of Cape Town.
- Harris, J. 1999. Ways of seeing the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): What contribution can such practices make to social inclusion? *Studies in the Education of Adults* 31(2): 124–139.
- Harris, J. 2002. *RPL: Power, pedagogy and possibility*. Pretoria: HSRC.
- Harris, J. 2004. The hidden curriculum of the Recognition of Prior Learning: A case study. PhD thesis, Open University, UK.
- Hendricks, N. and Volbrecht T. 2003. RPL as cognitive praxis in linking higher education, the African Renaissance and lifelong learning. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 17(1): 47–53.
- Hlongwane, I. 2008. The impact of UNISA's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy on access to higher education. Masters dissertation, UNISA.
- Isaacs, S. 2010. Lessons from the South African National Qualifications Framework. University of the Western Cape seminar presentation.
- JET (Joint Education Trust). 1998. Focus on higher education, job creation and workforce development. *JET Bulletin No 8*. Johannesburg: JET.

- JET. 2000. *RPL challenges higher education and workforce practice*. Conference proceedings of training and policy conference on RPL, Eskom Training Centre, 3–5 October. Johannesburg: JET.
- Khanyile, T. 2005a. The development of the model for Recognition of Prior Learning for nurses in South Africa: Development of the RPL guidelines by the policy makers and stakeholders of nursing. *Curationis* 28(4): 50–56.
- Khanyile, T. 2005b. The development of the model for Recognition of Prior Learning for nurses in South Africa: Implementation of the RPL guidelines by three nursing education institutions. *Curationis* 28(5): 53–60.
- King, E. 2003. From policy to implementation: Reality challenges. Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> national JET RPL conference, July.
- Lloyd, S. Forthcoming. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as social entrepreneurial practice. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Luckett, K. 1999. Ways of recognizing the prior learning of rural development workers. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 13(2): 68–80.
- Lugg, R., Mabitla, S., Louw, G. and Angelis, D. 1998. Workers' experiences of RPL in South Africa: Some implications for redress, equity and transformation. *Studies in Continuing Education* 20(2): 201–215.
- Maboye, M. Forthcoming. Understanding Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the context of organised labour: Opportunities and challenges. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Maher, K. (2011) *CRC for Rail Innovation, skills recognition framework, current and emerging issues in skilled recognition as relevant to the Australian rail industry*, CRC. Accessed November 2012 from: <http://www.railcrc.net.au/>
- Malgas, B. 2012. Research to determine the extent of SETA involvement in RPL activities. Draft research report submitted to the Ministerial Task Team on RPL, 3 May.
- Marock, C. 2000. Prior learning: What and why? *SA Labour Bulletin* 24(2): Skills Development Focus section.
- Marock, C. 2011. *Considering key themes relating to the objectives of the NQF and post-school objectives*. Centre for Education Policy Development. Research paper

commissioned to support the work of the developers of the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training.

Michelson, E. 1997. The politics of memory: The recognition of experiential learning. In S. Walters (ed). *Globalization, adult education and training – Impacts and issues*. USA: St. Martin's Press.

Michelson, E. 1999. Social transformation and the Recognition of Prior Learning: Lessons for and from South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 13(2): 99–102.

Michelson, E. 2012. Report and recommendations to SAQA based on international models of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Report on research commissioned by the South African Qualifications Authority.

Michelson, E. Forthcoming. Revisiting the introduction of Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa: Fifteen years on. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.

Mthembu, N. and Ngalamulume, N. 2010. Phase 1 report, SAQA research project, Workers' College, Durban. SAQA research project.

NEPI (National Education Policy Investigation). 1993. *The framework report and final report summaries*. Oxford: OUP.

Nortier, C. and MacKenzie, S. Forthcoming. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the financial regulatory environment. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.

NTB (National Training Board). 1994. *The Recognition of Prior Learning: Current thinking and status in South Africa*. Document of Work Committee 9. Pretoria: NTB.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). 2003. *Beyond rhetoric: Adult learning policies and practices*. Paris: OECD.

Osman, R. 2003. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): An emergent field of enquiry in South Africa. Doctoral thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.

Osman, R. 2004a. Access, equity and justice: Three perspectives on Recognition of Prior Learning in Higher Education. *Perspectives in Education* 22(4): 139–146.

Osman, R. 2004b. What matters in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)? Learning from experience in Higher Education. *Education as Change* 8(1): 50–60.

Osman, R. and Castle, J. 2002. Recognition of Prior Learning: A soft option in higher education in South Africa? *South African Journal of Higher Education* 16(2): 63–68.

- Osman, R. and J. Castle, J. 2004. The Recognition of Prior Learning in higher education: New challenges for teaching and learning. In S. Gravett and H. Geysers (eds). *Teaching and learning in higher education*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Pampallis, J. Forthcoming. Opening address of the national RPL Conference. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Perold, H., Cloete, N. and Papier, J. (eds). 2012. *Shaping the future of South Africa's youth: Rethinking post-school education and skills training*. Somerset West: African Minds for the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET), Southern African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) and the Further Education and Training Institute (FETI).
- Prinsloo, N. 2009. Recognition of Prior Learning within the public further education college sector. Masters thesis, University of the Western Cape.
- QCTO (Quality Council for Trades and Occupations). 2011. *QCTO curriculum and assessment policy*. Pretoria: QCTO.
- Ralphs, A. 2009. Specialised pedagogy: A comparative study of RPL practices within the changing landscape of the NQF in South Africa. Research proposal submitted to the South African Qualifications Authority.
- Ralphs, A. 2011. Exploring RPL: Assessment device and/or specialised pedagogical practice. *Journal of Education* 53: 22.
- Ralphs, A. 2012. RPL pedagogy and access to undergraduate programmes in higher education: A case study of existing practices at UWC. Research report prepared for the SAQA-UWC RPL research project Phase 1, UWC. SAQA research project.
- Recotillet I. and Werquin, P. 2009. The French VAE: Recognition of non-formal and informal learning as a visa for a job? *European Journal of Vocational Training* 48, 2009/3.
- RSA (Republic of South Africa). 1998. *National Standards Bodies Regulations, issued in terms of the SAQA Act 58*. Government Gazette No. 18787. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). 2001. *Criteria and guidelines for ETQAs*. Pretoria: SAQA.
- SAQA. 2002. *The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework*. Pretoria: SAQA.
- SAQA. 2004. *Criteria and guidelines for the implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Pretoria: SAQA.

- SAQA. 2011a. *Book of abstracts and summaries*. From the national RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23-25 February 2011. Pretoria: SAQA.
- SAQA. 2011b. *Resolution and working document on RPL*. From the national RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23-25 February 2011. Pretoria: SAQA.
- SAQA. 2012a. *Policy and criteria for recognising a professional body and registering a professional designation for the purposes of the National Qualifications Framework Act, Act 67 of 2008*. Accessed November 2012 from: [http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/profbody/policy\\_2008.pdf](http://www.saqa.org.za/docs/profbody/policy_2008.pdf).
- SAQA. 2012b. Policy and criteria for the recognition of prior learning. 30 August. Draft document prepared by the SAQA RPL reference group.
- SAQA. n.d. *NQF implementation framework: 2011–2015*. Pretoria: SAQA.
- SAQA. Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL Conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Shalem, Y. 2001. Recognition of Prior Learning in and through 'The Field' of academic practice. *Perspectives in Education* 19(1): 53–72.
- Shalem, Y. and Steinberg, C. 2002. Invisible criteria in a portfolio-based assessment of prior learning: A cat and mouse chase. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 10(3): 425–448.
- Shalem, Y. and Steinberg, C. 2006. Portfolio-based assessment of prior learning: A cat and mouse chase after invisible criteria. In P. Andersson and J. Harris (eds). *Re-theorising the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Leicester: NIACE.
- Sims, C. 2010. *Recognition of Prior Learning*. Briefing Note 27, City & Guilds Centre for Skills Development, London.
- Singh, M. 2011a. Funding models for RPL. Presentation made at SAQA's national RPL conference, Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011.
- Singh, M. 2011b. Lessons towards building a national RPL system. Presentation made at SAQA's national RPL conference, Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011.
- Smith, E. 2003. An RPL strategy for South African technikons. PhD thesis, University of Johannesburg (previously Rand Afrikaans University).



- Smith, E. Forthcoming. The new kid on the block has come to stay: Twelve years of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) implementation at the University of South Africa (UNISA). In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Snyman, M. Forthcoming. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): Putting policy into practice – a case study for learner support. In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- South African Government Information. 1997. *White Paper on Public Service Training and Education*. Accessed November 2012 from: <http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1997/publicservice.htm>.
- Sutherland, L. 2006. Challenges and opportunities for implementing RPL policy in higher education. PhD thesis, University of Zululand.
- Tloubata, M., Phenya, M. and Shapiro, Y. 2012. Analysis of the update of the Recognition of Prior Learning. *SAQA Bulletin* 12(3): 129–133.
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. 2012. *UNESCO guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNISA (University of South Africa). 2002. *Recognition of Prior Learning*. Accessed November 2012 from: [www.unisa.ac.za/dept/rpl](http://www.unisa.ac.za/dept/rpl)
- Van Kleef, J. 2012. Quality in prior learning assessment and recognition for internationally recognised nurses. PhD thesis, École des Haute Études en Sciences Sociales, Centre d'Études Sociologiques et Politiques Raymond Aron, CESPRA, Paris, France.
- Van Kleef, J. Forthcoming. Competency conversation: A quality-focused approach to alternative assessment methods in Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). In SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority). Forthcoming. *Book of RPL practices*. National RPL conference: Bridging and Expanding Existing Islands of Excellent Practice, 23–25 February 2011, SAQA.
- Volbrecht, T., Tisani, T., Hendricks, M.N. and Ralphs, A. 2006. Recognition of Prior Learning in the National Professional Diploma in Education. Research report prepared for the Education, Training and Development Practices SETA.
- Volbrecht, T. 2009. New courses for Trojan horses: Rethinking RPL in a South African teacher education curriculum. *Studies in Continuing Education* 31(1): 13–27.

Walters, S. 2005. Realising a lifelong learning higher education institution. In P. Sutherland and J. Crowther (eds). *Lifelong learning: Concepts and contexts*. UK: Routledge Falmer.

Weil, S. and McGill, I. 1989. *Making sense of experiential learning: Diversity in theory and practice*. Buckingham: SRHE and OUP.

Werquin, P. 2010. *Recognising non-formal and informal learning: Outcomes, policies and practices*. Paris: OECD.

Werquin, P. 2012. Enabling recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes in France: The VAE legislation. Case study commissioned by SAQA.