

Chapter 2:

Planning: The development of sector-specific/ context-specific plans

Introduction

Chapter 2 of the guideline document deals with the planning of RPL initiatives at the macro and micro levels; i.e. at the level of the ETQA in conjunction with its constituent providers, and at the level of the provider⁵.

Purpose of this chapter

As the title suggests, this chapter intends to highlight the need for ETQAs and their constituent providers to critically engage with the planning of RPL at national, regional and institutional levels. At this point it is important for ETQAs and their providers, including workplace-based and small-, medium-, and micro enterprise (SMME) providers, to agree on:

- the criteria for quality assurance of RPL within the sector, including their RPL policies and implementation procedures;
- the targets (over time) for implementation within sectors; and
- the partnerships and collaboration that may need to take place in order to implement RPL successfully.

In terms of the planning, the following will be addressed:

- policy and procedural development, including the documentation of quality assurance processes;
- establishment of the purpose and intended outcomes of RPL within the sector and provider, i.e. access, placement, advanced standing, formal certification, or a combination of these;
- identification of and establishment of a target area (field of learning) and the level, for example under-graduate, post-graduate, FET, etc.;
- identification of a target market, i.e. the unemployed, under-qualified practitioners; candidates without formal entry requirements, workplace based candidates, etc.; and
- the support structures required (candidates and staff) for achieving the aims of the sector and institution.

⁵ The term "provider" is used in accordance with the understanding of an education and training provider, i.e. "a body who delivers learning programmes which culminate in specified National Qualifications Framework (NQF) standards or qualifications and manages the assessment thereof" (Criteria and Guidelines for Providers, SAQA, 2001, p. 31).

In addition, based on the context, planning for the following will also be addressed:

- articulation and learning pathways and the administrative processes capable of dealing with credit transcription and transfers;
- review and moderation of assessment processes and tools, i.e. the nature and extent of quality assurance, the frequency of moderation and methodologies;
- principles of assessment, i.e. weighting of evidence in relation to the qualification and level; and
- the flexibility of entry and exit points.

The planning process will be incomplete if planning does not also incorporate the identification and costing of:

- person hours;
- staff development, including administrative and support staff;
- infrastructure;
- assessor/moderator guides;
- short-term plans, including target numbers and groups; and
- roll-out plans and planning for lobbying of funds and resources.

2.1 Policies and procedures: An enabling environment

Establishing an enabling environment suggests a structure that will facilitate the development and implementation of RPL. In the words of the SAQA RPL policy (Chapter 2):

Unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict.

This sentiment also emerges from a number of international approaches. For example, Urban Whitaker (1989: 9-10) states that even at the level of the learner “policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available”.

Policies and procedures give legitimacy and structure to a process. This does not mean to say that policies should be rigid, but that it will encourage would-be implementers of RPL to be very clear on the intended purpose and outcomes of the initiative.

The self-audit tool from the SAQA RPL policy document highlights this as follows:

INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND ENVIRONMENT		
	YES	NO
There is a shared commitment on the part of ETQAs, accredited constituent providers and workplaces to provide enabling environments for learning and assessment (inclusive of close cooperation between administration, learning facilitators, evidence facilitators, advisors, assessors, moderators, professional organisations, employers, trade unions and communities, where appropriate).		
The assessment policy expresses an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion.		
The assessment policy reflects planning and management in accordance with relevant legislation and policy.		
Information about assessment opportunities and services is widely available and actively promoted.		
Admission procedures and systems are accessible and inclusive of learners with diverse needs and backgrounds.		
Equal access exists to opportunities for advice, support, time and resources for all candidates seeking assessment.		
Organisational structures ensure that evidence facilitators, assessors and moderators and other key personnel, such as advisors, are given sufficient support, resources and recognition for their services.		
Regional integration and collaboration are encouraged among institutions, professional bodies and workplaces, where possible.		
Formal agreements between ETQAs, providers and workplaces are encouraged to ensure effective validation, articulation and recognition of assessment results, where possible.		

There is a clear indication, in the opening statement of the self-audit tool above, that providers and their constituent ETQAs must have aligned policies and procedures. Also, that such policies should be in line with the SAQA RPL policy and that the policy should incorporate all the activities surrounding RPL. Policies and procedures should be clearly spelt out, based on the principles of equity of access and redress and should be inclusive of non-traditional learners wanting to enter education and training. The message of such a policy is therefore that there is an **institutional ‘will’ to open up access** to learners coming from diverse backgrounds, displaying diverse needs and capabilities.

The development of policies and procedures is therefore a very important phase in planning for RPL. A policy should clearly state:

2.1.1 The purpose of RPL within the sector

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

The following descriptions for the abovementioned options may be helpful:

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

The purpose of RPL within a particular sector would be closely linked to the target market and target area.

2.1.2 The target market and target area

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

2.1.3 Support structures

Support structures are required at different levels. At the level of the ETQAs, support may be required by their constituent providers wanting to implement RPL. The benefits of support at this level are threefold:

- to enhance an understanding of the quality assurance requirements as established by the ETQA for the implementation of RPL;
- to develop a common interpretation of the requirements for evidence for the unit standards and qualifications; and
- to facilitate the transferability of credits between constituent providers.

Education and training practitioners may also need particular support structures, where they can critically engage with their proposed methodologies and tools, and in this way ensure that there is consistency in the interpretation and assessment of learning. The internal moderation function of the provider/institution is important in this regard, particularly in ensuring that the internal processes are in line with the requirements of the ETQA. This also supports the development of a cadre of RPL specialist practitioners.

Depending on the sector and target market, the level of support required by RPL candidates must be determined. Care workers in Early Childhood Development, for example, may need much more support in the collection and presentation of evidence in relation to a qualification than would a graduate who wishes to access a Master's programme.

2.1.4 Quality assurance

How and when quality assurance interventions should be made and the nature of these interventions should also be spelt out in the policy and procedures dealing with assessment and RPL. The ETQA should give direction and guidance as to how their constituent providers/institutions could meet the agreed quality assurance criteria. During the planning stage, these quality criteria must be established in conjunction with constituent providers/institutions. Quality assurance should not be an add-on, but an integral part of the planning of the initiative. The provider/institution will plan its quality assurance cycles, including moderation at various stages of the process, in accordance with these requirements.

The following example of a 'generic' template for an RPL policy is a combination of a number of ETQA RPL policies. Such a policy could contain the following headings:

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

1. Objective

For example: This policy covers the process of gathering evidence and making judgements about a learner's performance in relation to standards and qualifications. The policy outlines the process whereby such evidence is assessed and credited.

2. Scope

For example: The assessment of learning is a service available to all learners who have appropriate learning and skills in relation to qualifications for which this institution is accredited, regardless of where and how the learning was obtained.

3. Legislative context

For example: The SAQA Act, NSB Regulations, Skills Development Act

4. Principles of assessment

For example: All assessments are subject to the principles of:

- validity
- fairness
- reliability
- practicability

5. Criteria and registration of assessors

6. Support structures for learners and assessors

7. Process of assessment

8. Moderation and quality assurance

For example: Assessment instruments will be moderated by learning area specialists before assessments take place. 10% of completed assessments will be moderated for consistency, fairness, and reliability.

9. Procedures for appeal

10. Certification of learners

11. Articulation of learning

12. Record keeping

Extracts from the Victoria University of Technology's policy and procedures (Melbourne, Australia), indicate what such a policy may look like (Fleet, 1997:36–39, in Harris, 2000:150–153):

Victoria University**Recognition of Prior Learning – Policy and Procedures****1. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for the implementation of Recognition of Prior learning procedures within the TAFE and higher education sectors of Victoria University of Technology.

2. Definition of Recognition of Prior Learning

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is the acknowledgement of skills and knowledge already acquired by a person from work and/or life experience or from previous study. This prior learning may include:

- 2.1 courses provided by professional bodies, voluntary associations, enterprises, private educational institutions, trade unions, government agencies and/or other providers recognised by a university;
- 2.2 work or other forms of practical experience; and
- 2.3 life experience.

3. Policy

When selecting students for admission, the University takes into account the wide variety of backgrounds and learning experiences of the applicants. Students undertaking courses at Victoria University of Technology may be eligible to have this prior learning and experience recognized.

The Faculty/School will determine where RPL is available.

4. Authority and scope

This policy has been developed to enable the Victoria University to implement the university's objectives in relation to the Recognition of Prior Learning.

- 4.1 This policy does not apply where formal credit transfer arrangements have been established
- 4.2 Eligibility for RPL Assessment does not guarantee an applicant a place in the course.

5. Procedures

- 5.1 The procedure for the assessment of prior learning as the basis for credit in a course offered by the University is determined by the schools/faculties.
- 5.2 Dissemination of information
 - 5.2.1 Information on the University's Recognition of Prior Learning policy and procedures will be made available to students through:
 - the faculty handbooks; and
 - the publication of a university brochure on RPL.
- 5.3 Right of appeal
 - 5.3.1 Applicants who are either denied RPL or who wish to challenge the amount of credit given from RPL may request further consideration. Such appeals must be filed within 10 working days of issue of the notification of the outcomes of the assessment.

6. Fees

Any fees applicable to RPL assessment will be determined through the University standard processes.

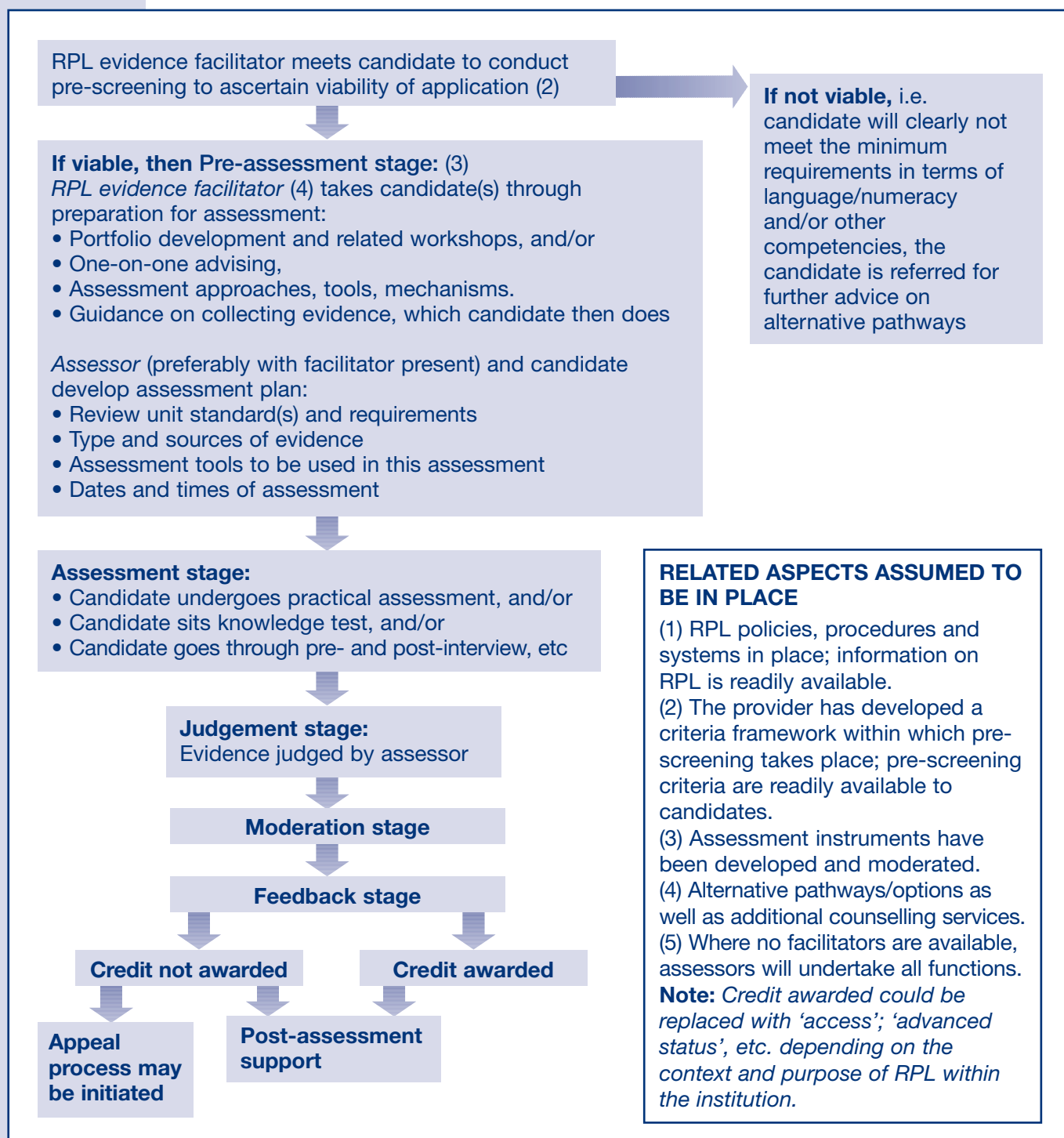
7. Monitoring

This policy will be monitored as part of the University's Undergraduate and Coursework Programmes Committee.

2.1.5 Procedures

A policy is only as good as its implementation. The RPL policy should therefore be followed by clear procedures. The generic RPL process in the SAQA RPL policy is a good example of what such procedures could consist of and is summarised below.

A generic RPL process:



2.1.6 Review and moderation

The generic process in the SAQA RPL policy document assumes that the provider has already decided upon the most appropriate assessment methodologies and instruments and that the necessary moderation of such instruments has taken place. The moderation stage intends to evaluate the whole process, including the moderation of fit-for-purpose assessment instruments and methodologies and the moderation of practitioner practice, as well as the assessment results.

However, an important decision, and an important part of the planning, is the process whereby review and moderation will take place. This includes decisions about how often such reviews may take place, by whom they will be conducted, and the size of the sample for moderation of assessment results (more about moderation and review in Chapter 5). Accountability in terms of RPL is critical for the credibility of the process. Careful quality management ensures that credits attained through the process of RPL are considered equal to credits attained through full-time programmes.

2.2 Articulation arrangements

A critical part of the planning of RPL processes in a sector and institution/provider is the decisions relating to how credits gained through RPL assessment will articulate with formal programmes. This takes place at three levels:

2.2.1 Articulation Column

The draft New Academic Policy (CHE, 2001: 32), suggests that in the proposed ‘articulation column’, a ‘curriculum space’ be provided “where learners who do not meet the full entry requirements for their target programmes can ‘catch up’ without having to go back to the beginning again, and where RPL can be implemented”. This column is the home of articulation certificates such as Bridging and Foundational Certificates, Graduate, Post-graduate and Master’s certificates. These certificates are to be credit bearing and will facilitate horizontal, vertical and diagonal (in terms of the proposed vocational and general tracks) articulation. The development of such programmes will assist in ‘filling in the gaps’ that may have been identified as a result of an RPL process.⁶

2.2.2 Intra-institutional articulation

Credit-bearing ‘articulation’ programmes can only be developed in relation to the requirements for registered unit standards and qualifications. This means that before formal articulation programmes can be established, would-be implementers of RPL must be clear on how learning recognised through prior learning could articulate with particular learning fields and qualifications.

⁶ The principle of ‘articulation’, howsoever operationalised, is the key aspect of this part of the discussion. The draft New Academic Policy’s position should be viewed as an example, in keeping with the notion of a ‘living document’.

Implementers must, in relation to the chosen field of learning, analyse:

- How knowledge⁷ is understood
- Who defines what counts as knowledge
- How knowledge is organised
- How learning is understood
- How experience and learning from experience are understood
- How pedagogy is understood

(Harris, 2000: 95-96)

This will greatly facilitate an understanding of what should be assessed and the number of credits that could be awarded for such learning and how the learning could be articulated with formal programmes. Consider the following example of a hypothetical qualification:

Bachelor of Commerce (Management)

Purpose statement:

Qualifying learners awarded with this degree will have the requisite competence to manage a business in a particular sphere of expertise.

The key applied competence in terms of this qualification is to be able to manage a business in a particular sphere. Using the points mentioned above, this qualification could be analysed according to the criteria set out below.

- How is knowledge understood in terms of the **management of a business?**
- Who decides how **management** is defined?
- How is the knowledge of **management** organised in this learning programme?
- What kind of learning, in terms of **management**, will tell me that the learner has mastered the knowledge?
- What kinds of experience and learning in **management**, outside of the context of this institution, will tell me that the learner has mastered the knowledge?
- How do we teach **management**?

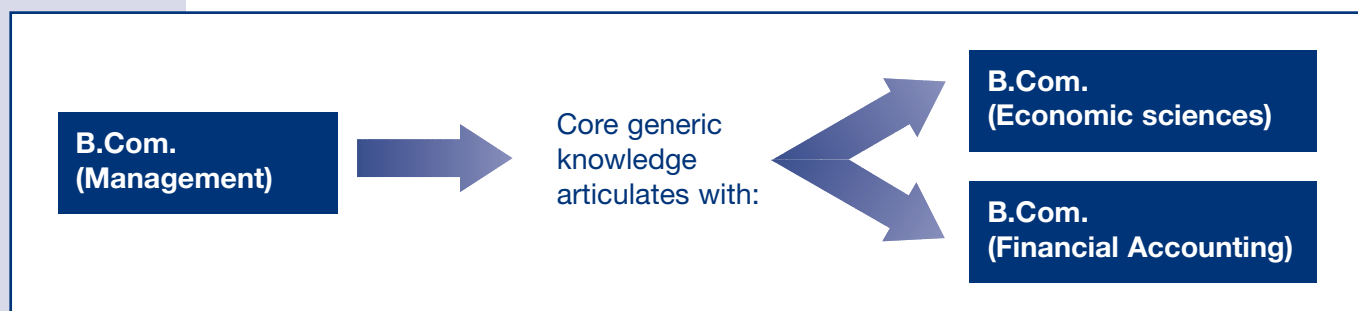
The starting point therefore is to clearly specify what is understood, in terms of the qualification, about what **management of a business** would entail. For example:

Management of a business includes:

- consideration of market forces (carrying out feasibility studies and market research, for example);
- fiscal management (budgeting and planning); and
- business planning (strategic vision of now and in the future etc).

⁷ Knowledge refers to 'applied competence' as defined in official documents, i.e. 'the union of practical, foundational and reflexive competence' which incorporate skills, knowledge, and values associated with the requirements for a qualification.

Going through this process allows clarification on how learning attained outside formal institutions may be considered and valued in relation to formal programmes. It also assists in deciding where such learning could be articulated in a qualification or a range of related qualifications, for example:



In addition, analysing a qualification (or a range of related qualifications) in this way, assists with the development of regional or inter-institutional agreements, using the generic descriptors for levels and qualifications as a point of departure. Where all the role players in a particular field of learning agree that the specific outcomes for a qualification could be interpreted in the broad, generic manner outlined above, the movement of learners and credit transfer between institutions and between workplaces and institutions will be facilitated (Heyns, 2004).

2.2.3 Administration and the transcription of credits

As indicated in Chapter 1, the administrative process of institutions may be a barrier to the implementation of RPL. In the planning for implementation, it is therefore important to look at how the learning credited will be transcribed and articulated with 'mainstream' qualifications. The following questions may be helpful:

- Will credits be recorded in terms of an academic record?
- Will credits be formally certificated?
- What is the status of such credits?
- Will credits be used for advanced standing, placement or certification?
- What is the value of such credits in relation to the target qualification?
- How will such credits be transferred?
- How will credits gained in workplace assessments be articulated with formal qualifications?

These questions suggest that practitioners must be clear on **the relative value** of each part of the qualification in terms of the overall requirements. In the example of the B.Com. (Management) above, the core of the qualification clearly deals with 'management'. Therefore, the relative value (or weighting) of credits in terms of management will be more than other supporting parts of the qualification. Consider the following example of a hypothetical qualification:

A qualification at NQF level 4: A National Certificate: Reception, consists of 60 credits for fundamental learning, 40 credits for core learning and 20 credits for elective learning. In line with the purpose of the qualification, i.e. to form the basis for further learning, clearly the assessment would be weighted to concentrate more on the Fundamental and Core learning. The structure of the qualification in terms of the purpose, the fundamentals, the core and electives should be used as a guideline to determine the relative weighting of the parts of the qualification.

In the SAQA RPL policy it is made clear that the assessment of learners who attain credits through the process of RPL should not be more stringent than assessment for learners in full-time programmes. This means that if 50% is the minimum requirement for the successful achievement of credits in a full-time programme, RPL learners should also be required to achieve only 50%. It should not be more difficult for RPL learners to ‘pass’ than it is for full-time learners.

Also, all assessments must comply with the principles of assessment, particularly in terms of the currency and sufficiency of evidence offered for evaluation. More about assessment principles in Chapter 4.

2.2.4 Flexibility of entry and exit points

Flexibility in terms of entry is clear. A learner should be able to enter a programme at the appropriate point. In other words, where a learner has met the requirements for the first year/semester/quarter, the learner should be able to enter the programme at the point where the second year/semester/quarter starts.

Flexibility of exit will depend on whether the learning programme for a qualification has been structured in levels; for example, where a certificate could be the exit point, with formal credits awarded, but where the learner could continue at a later stage with a diploma, degree, etc. with each of these also representing an exit point.

2.3 Resources

The planning of RPL within institutions and workplaces will not be complete unless the resources needed for its implementation are clearly defined and allocated.

Resources include:

2.3.1 Person hours

There is no doubt that the planning for the implementation of RPL in an institution or workplace, will require planning for the time to be spent by staff. It should be noted however, that the implementation of any new approach requires people hours, not only the implementation of RPL processes. The time spent on planning should be seen as an investment into a new approach, not as time away from other (perceived to be more important) duties.

In addition, the need for people hours should also include the planning for time spent on support for learners wanting to access education and training, the assessment of such learners and the post-assessment support that may be required. When planning for people hours in this regard, would-be implementers should find ways in which one-on-one strategies are kept to the minimum. For example:

- Screening processes could be conducted in groups through self-assessment questionnaires. If the application is viable, this could then be followed by an individual session.
- General orientation and information sessions could take place in groups.
- Challenge examinations could be conducted during normal examination periods.

However, one-on-one sessions should not be avoided. Even in full-time classroom-based programmes, practitioners will be required to conduct one-on-one sessions with learners. With an RPL process, one-on-one sessions could include pre-assessment interviews, action planning for evidence collection, post-assessment interviews, and support.

2.3.2 Staff development, including administrative and support staff

Planning for staff development, including that of administrative and support staff, is critical for the success of RPL in an institution or workplace. The SAQA RPL policy is explicit on the need for training of evidence facilitators, assessors and moderators. Training for administrative staff that will be dealing with applications for RPL, and with the transcription of credits, is also important. For this reason, planning should include the time and cost requirements for the training of staff.

2.3.3 Infrastructure

The extent to which specific infrastructure is needed for the support and assessment of RPL learners will depend on the context within which this is to be implemented. As far as is possible, existing infrastructure should be used. Where alternative/additional forms of infrastructure are required, the institution or workplace should investigate whether this could not also be used for ‘mainstream’ programmes. This will ensure that the infrastructure not only meets the requirements for RPL, but also enhances the services for full-time candidates.

2.3.4 Assessor/moderator guides

The establishment of assessor guides, in keeping with the principles of assessment, is a very important part of the planning. Practitioners new to RPL processes will need opportunities to engage with and critically debate the most appropriate methodologies, instruments and tools. Assessor guidelines could ensure that the processes followed in different contexts in an institution or workplace adheres to the same principles of validity, reliability, practicability, sufficiency and currency. The ETQA has a very important role to play here. To be able to award certificates, ETQAs must be convinced that the RPL processes and assessments have taken place in accordance with their requirements. This may include the development of standardised assessor and moderator guides to be used by a range of their

constituent providers, including workplace-based and SMME providers (more about these in Chapter 5).

Moderator guidelines will be informed by the decisions made on the quality assurance of RPL processes as captured in the policy and procedures. Moderation guidelines could include the agreed-upon processes for the moderation of assessment instruments, the number (or percentage) of assessments moderated, and the moderation of the overall process. Moderation and quality assurance are critical for the integrity of the system and should, therefore, be carefully planned.

2.3.5 Short-term plans and rollout of the initiative

The planning process will culminate in action plans, which include short-term, medium-term and long-term plans.

Where RPL is introduced in an institution or workplace for the first time, short-term plans could include a clearly defined pilot group, with broader implementation planned in the medium or long term.

The rollout of RPL implementation on a wider scale will be informed by the audit of current practice as discussed in Chapter 1 of these guidelines. Part of the medium-to-long-term plans may include lobbying for targeted funds or for changes to current inhibiting procedures and processes.

Summary

This chapter does not claim to have addressed all the necessary components of the planning process for RPL implementation. However, it is important that would-be implementers, within the contexts that they find themselves, plan for implementation carefully and accountably. This will protect the integrity of the system and ensure that credits awarded through RPL are not considered ‘second-best’ or inferior to credits attained through full-time programmes.

Chapter 3 will deal with the capacity building of resources and staff.