

Chapter 3:

Getting ready: The capacity building of resources and staff

Introduction

In Chapter 2 of this document, planning for the implementation of RPL was discussed. Planning will take place within the context, purpose and desired outcomes of RPL within a particular sector. In addition, the ETQA, in conjunction with its constituent institutions/providers, must agree and implement capacity-building plans for the following:

- the training of staff;
- the development of assessor and moderator guidelines, including assessment processes and procedures;
- appropriate infrastructure for assessment, including reporting mechanisms; and
- the quality assurance of processes and results, including internal and external moderation processes.

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter will focus on the core competencies required for RPL work, including determining what qualities and credentials are required for practitioners. These competencies include the requirements in terms of registration of assessors and moderators in line with legislation and policy. This chapter also highlights the need for the training of all staff involved or with an interest in the implementation of RPL. In order to obtain support for the initiative, the management and executives of organisations must also be exposed to the concepts and principles of RPL.

3.1 Training of staff

The SAQA RPL policy is explicit about the need for appropriate training of staff that will be dealing with the RPL process. The self-audit tool in the policy (SAQA RPL Policy p. 23) highlights the following aspects:

Training and registration of assessors and key personnel

Through training of assessors and other personnel involved in assessment, the quality of assessments and the integrity of the assessment system are ensured. Training enables evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators, advisors and administrative personnel to provide a holistic, learner-centred service that is in keeping with the objectives of the NQF and related policies. Monitoring policies ensure that assessors' and moderators' professional competencies in assessment are reviewed and updated.

	YES	NO
The criteria for the registration of assessors and moderators makes explicit provision for the requisite certification in the relevant unit standards designed for that purpose, in accordance with the relevant principles and standards for assessment and moderation as set out in SAQA and other policy documents.		
Policies and review mechanisms regarding monitoring and quality assurance of evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators and other key personnel are in place.		
The functions of evidence facilitation, assessment and advising are clearly defined and, where possible, should not be performed by the same person.		
Training and development encourage mentoring relationships between staff with and those without assessment expertise.		
Quality assurance systems are implemented by all training providers to ensure that they increasingly meet the developmental objectives as agreed with the ETQA.		

These criteria link the quality of the process with the extent to which practitioners are trained and competent for their different roles in the RPL process. The criteria also make it clear that not only the assessor needs training for his/her role, but that the activities preceding and those coming after the actual assessment are as critical for success as the assessment itself, including moderation of the overall processes.

In Chapter 2 of this document, a generic RPL process is discussed. This flow diagram points to the fact that a number of personnel will be involved with RPL. The first point of contact (according to this flow diagram), would be with an 'evidence facilitator'. It is likely that an administrative staff member or student career guidance advisor may have already had some contact with the candidate. It is important that these staff members are also exposed to training to develop a sensitivity for the particular needs of applicants. They should be aware and be part of the processes and procedures in place for dealing with RPL candidates.

3.1.1 Evidence facilitator

Evidence facilitation is part of the pre-assessment stage. The pre-assessment stage consists of at least two separate steps:

- screening; and
- pre-assessment.

During the **screening phase**, the evidence facilitator will meet with a candidate/candidates to ascertain viability of the application for RPL. If the application is not viable, the candidate is informed about alternative learning pathways.

If it is viable, the evidence facilitator and candidate embark on the **pre-assessment phase**. During the pre-assessment phase, the evidence facilitator introduces the candidate(s) to the process of assessment and the support services, including possible short learning programmes that will assist candidates in preparing their evidence (for example, portfolio-development or academic writing skills etc.).

A unit standard was recently developed and registered for this critical part of the assessment process. The purpose of the unit standard clearly states what a successful evidence facilitator will be able to do:

This unit standard will be useful to people who assist candidates to prepare and present evidence for assessment. Such evidence facilitators will add value to the assessment process by ensuring candidates are ready to present well organised and complete evidence to registered assessors. The value will be particularly felt when assisting candidates who are competent in their field, but are unable to present coherent evidence of that fact for reasons unrelated to their skill area.

People credited with this unit standard are able to:

- Provide information to candidates about assessment in general and their assessment in particular;
- Advise and support candidates to prepare, organise and present evidence; and
- Evaluate and give feedback on candidate evidence.

(SAQA, 2002: 35)

Studies have shown that this part of the RPL process is very important. A well-prepared candidate is much more likely to succeed and, therefore, the time spent on this part of the process is well spent. The facilitator, as part of the team that supports the candidate should be thoroughly aware of the requirements for the assessment. Evidence facilitation could be part of the learner advisory services offered by an institution/provider or an appropriate and responsible person in the workplace.

Ideally, evidence facilitation and assessment should be performed by two different people to avoid potential conflict of interest and bias, but resource constraints may make this impossible. To minimise the bias, and to accommodate the need for cost-efficiency, the two roles are distinct; i.e. that of an evidence facilitator and of an assessor. Should an assessor have to fulfil both roles, he/she will need to be competent in both evidence facilitation and assessment and be clear on the purposes, roles and functions of these two stages.

3.1.2 Assessor

The assessor has a central role to play in the emerging education and training system of South Africa. An assessor is “anyone who assesses for the purposes of making a judgement about an achievement that will result in credits towards unit standards or qualifications” (SAQA, 2001: 47).

In the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Registration of Assessors* (SAQA, 2001: 7), the role and expertise of assessors are described. An important mindset, critical in terms of assessment and the role of an assessor, is captured in the following:

“Learning [and assessment] is no longer something that is ‘done to’ the learner, but something that the learner is actively involved in. As such the role of the assessor has changed: from being a ‘gate-keeper’ who uses assessment to prevent learners from developing further, to a supportive guide who has the success of the learner at heart – so that the learner can gain access to further learning.”

This principle is especially true for candidates wishing to have their prior learning recognised, particularly because the candidate claims that learning has already taken place. Therefore, a candidate claiming credits against registered unit standards and qualifications will meet his/her assessor prior to the assessment, as part of the team (evidence facilitator and assessor) that supports and guides the candidate.

The generic assessor standard (ASSMT01), “Plan and conduct assessment of learning”, expresses this role of the assessor as follows:

Specific outcome 1: Plan and prepare for assessment

Specific outcome 2: Prepare candidates for assessment

Whereas the evidence facilitator will provide support and information of a general nature in terms of the unit standards and qualifications, the assessor will provide in-depth support and information directly related to their specialist field of learning. In addition, the assessor will have a ‘birds’ eye-view’ of the overall outcome(s) and purpose(s) of the qualification, making it possible to use an integrated approach to assessment. The assessor will in the pre-assessment phase, for example, discuss the following in terms of the assessment plan:

- the purpose and process of the assessment and the expectations of candidates;
- the performance to be assessed;
- the type of evidence to be collected to cover a range of skills and knowledge, including problem-solving skills, knowledge, understanding, language and writing skills (where appropriate); practical and technical skills, personal and attitudinal skills and values;
- assessment methods and instruments to be used (and appropriate alternatives where required or emanating from discussions with the candidate);
- the timing of assessment;
- the sequence of activities;
- accountabilities, deadlines, appeal processes; and
- arrangements for the reviewing of assessment plans.

At this point, the assessor will also indicate the roles and responsibilities of each of the members of the team supporting the candidate, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the candidate, for example:

The role of the learner

It is the candidate's responsibility to identify his/her prior learning and show that it matches the learning outcomes for a particular course or courses that form part of a programme leading to a desired qualification. It is the candidate's responsibility to prove that he/she has learned what she claims to have learned.

Rights of the learner

- The right to fair and transparent processes;
- Access up front to the standards and criteria which will be used in the assessment and accreditation processes;
- Access up front to the learning outcomes to be met;
- Access to competent, trained educators and assessors who want them to succeed and who explore innovative methods to assist them to do so, who balance adequate subject knowledge and critical cross-field outcomes with skills, competencies and practical knowledge and are skilled in working with diverse groups of adult candidates to build learning communities;
- The right to be assessed by assessment methods which are flexible, appropriate to the subject and tailored to the needs of the candidate;
- The right to have prior learning evaluated and assessed for academic credit towards credentials within a reasonable period of time; [and]
- The right to transfer credits gained by means of the RPL process.

(CTP, 2001: 21)

When candidates are sufficiently prepared for assessment, then the assessor:

“Conduct[s] assessment and document[s] evidence” (specific outcome 3 of the ASSMT01 standard).

Assessment is defined as “a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgements about an individual's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications” (SAQA, 2001: 16). Assessment should ensure that a true reflection of a candidate's skills, knowledge and values are identified. In terms of training, this means that an assessor should be a subject matter expert, but should also have the contextual expertise needed for an understanding of the occupational contexts within which the candidate may have gained the learning. This requires that the assessor be able to assess holistically and without bias.

Note: Clearly, an assessor can only assess a learner if he/she has the full contextual knowledge and understanding of the learning to be assessed. An assessor will only be registered (in terms of the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Registration of Assessors*, 2001) when he/she is deemed competent in the generic assessor standard and an expert in the field of learning in which assessments will be undertaken.

A holistic approach

In the SAQA RPL policy (SAQA, 2002: 11) a holistic approach refers to the ability to look for the “intrinsic, rather than extrinsic value of someone’s learning within a particular context and the ways in which some forms of knowledge are privileged. The question that we need to answer is how to redefine, systematically and consciously, which knowledge is valued.” (A model to develop an understanding in this regard will be discussed in Chapter 4 of this document.) A contextual understanding of the candidate’s learning will greatly enhance the possibilities for evidence to be presented, accepted and articulated. A holistic approach tries to prevent visible and invisible biases from influencing the ways in which we assess, thereby making it possible to acknowledge and utilise the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles.

Bias

In South Africa, ‘bias’ is particularly associated with issues of race, language, religion, gender and class, but numerous other forms of bias may have an impact on the assessment of candidates in terms of their prior learning. The bias against experiential and non-formal forms of learning, for example, may inhibit the assessor from finding alternative forms of evidence for applied knowledge and skills, particularly if such evidence is not presented in a ‘traditional’ format. Anti-bias and sensitivity training, specifically as it relates to the fears and doubts of adult learners, should be an integral part of assessor training.

Specific outcome 4 of the generic assessor unit standard requires that an assessor should be able to **“evaluate evidence and make assessment judgements”**.

The integrity of the assessment and, equally important, of the RPL system hinges on the extent to which assessors can evaluate evidence and make assessment judgements in a credible and accountable way. This places a huge responsibility on assessors and requires a critical reflection on their own practices. It is for this reason that support structures for assessors are as important as those for candidates. Mentoring and coaching of assessors by internal moderators and external verifiers are critical to develop the skills and abilities of assessors.

In the Committee of Technical Principals (CTP) RPL policy document (CTP, 2001: 17), assessors are given the following decision-making powers:

Assessors may:

- Grant the level of credit sought by the candidate;
- Grant credit in excess of the level sought by the candidate;
- Grant credit at a lower level than that sought by the candidate;
- Grant such credit as is appropriate in the circumstances;
- Refuse to grant credit;
- Request that additional information be provided in whatever format necessary;
- Refer the candidate for additional learning programmes and request reassessment after completion;
- Review the RPL process and take appropriate actions to improve the performance where necessary;
- Follow national guidelines for an appeals/grievance procedures for candidates who may want to appeal against an unfavourable outcome on procedural or academic grounds and design a procedures template.

Clearly, this level of responsibility requires an in-depth understanding of assessment and the role of the assessor. Would-be implementers may opt for ‘assessment panels’ at the beginning stages of implementation to safeguard against bias. The Technikon of Southern Africa uses the following model:

ASSESSMENT PANEL
Academic(s) Industry representative Trained [RPL] assessor
CANDIDATE SUPPORT PANEL
Interpreter Support person(s)

In terms of the SAQA regulations, all practitioners who will be responsible for the assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes leading to qualifications and standards registered on the NQF should be trained to become certificated assessors and registered constituent assessors for specified qualifications and/or standards with the appropriate ETQA. Qualified practitioners will be listed on the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD) as having achieved the minimum standard, i.e. the generic assessor standard ASSMT01.

Part of the responsibility of the assessor also includes:

‘[To] **provide feedback to relevant parties**’ (**Specific outcome 5** of the generic assessor standard).

Apart from the administrative processes, where reports are submitted and recorded with the appropriate structures, assessors should be able to comment on the quality and sufficiency of the candidate’s performance in relation to the agreed outcomes and criteria and should ensure that their feedback is constructive and the basis for further decisions. In addition, a candidate has the right to give feedback on the process and may request further clarification and explanation. The appeals process, introduced to the candidate during the pre-assessment phase, may be initiated at this point.

The final specific outcome (**Specific outcome 6: Review assessment**) is a critical skill required of assessors. Weaknesses identified in the assessment design and process that may compromise the fairness of assessment must be dealt with in accordance with the provider/institution’s assessment policy. Where weaknesses arise as a result of poor quality unit standards and qualifications, this information must be made available to the responsible ETQA. To be critical of one’s own practices requires open-mindedness and a developmental approach. Training of assessors must address this aspect.

To conclude this section, it should be acknowledged that the implementation of RPL could be both a cost- and labour-intensive exercise, particularly as RPL processes are currently not subsidised. It is therefore important that providers/institutions develop cost-effective mechanisms for dealing with RPL requests. These may include minimising the need for one-on-one evidence facilitation and assessment where appropriate, but it should be noted that in classroom-based assessments, many examples exist where learners are also assessed individually, for example:

- assignments – the assessor evaluates each learner’s assignment individually;
- verbal reports/speeches;
- projects;
- portfolios; and
- demonstrations and simulations etc.

Note: Good assessment practices will include such methodologies for classroom-based learning. Yet, when we plan for RPL assessment, the notion of ‘labour intensiveness’ is raised as an inhibitor to the implementation of RPL.

3.2 Assessor and moderator guidelines

3.2.1 Assessor guides

The assessor guide is a standardised ‘toolkit’ developed in conjunction with the internal and external moderator to ensure consistency of assessment. This is a critical part of the planning for RPL implementation and facilitates a common approach and understanding of the approach and procedures to be followed. At this level it could be highly generic: i.e. it describes an approach that could be used in any context. Consider the Construction Sector Education and Training Authority’s (CETA’s) assessor guide:

The **ASSESSOR GUIDE** is one of the instruments the assessor uses in the assessment and action planning stage.

The **TOOLKIT** of the assessor consists of the following:

Assessment procedure

Action plan procedure

And the following **instruments**:

1. Assessor guide
2. Assessment report
3. Evidence guide
4. Instruction for candidate
5. Orientation document
6. Action plan
7. RPL evaluation form

(CETA, 2002: 2 of Assessor guide 1)

Assessor guides will be developed with the context of the sector and provider/institution in mind.

An **evidence guide** will be part of the assessor guide (see above). The evidence guide will assist the assessor in determining what to look for within the context of the particular field of learning. The process that determines what will be proof of a candidate’s learning and experience is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this document.

Consider the extracts from the CETA evidence guides as an example:

Evidence guide: RPL I 05 02 01

SECTION 1: INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE ASSESSOR

The purpose of this section is to assist you to assess a candidate in accordance with the objective of the assessment and help you plan the assessment.

1.1 Content of the assessment in brief

1.1.1 Objective of the assessment

To establish the [applied] competence [and knowledge] of a learner/candidate based on the assessment criteria for _____

A candidate declared competent [as having the requisite knowledge, skills and values] will receive credits and a recommendation for an award that will be registered by the ETQA.

1.1.2 Outcomes to be assessed

(What is to be assessed?)

1.1.3 Assessment criteria

(What will tell the assessor that a candidate meets the requirements of the outcomes?)

Clearly, the evidence guide is much more specific than the over-arching assessor guide, dealing with the specifics within a particular field of learning.

3.2.2 Moderator guides

The moderation function of a provider/institution is a key aspect of the overall approach to quality assurance. Quality assurance will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this document, but it is important to note that accountability is considered to be integral to the new approach of education and training in South Africa. The *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (SAQA, 2001: 60) indicates that moderation takes place at four levels:

1. NSBs submit qualifications with moderation options.
2. ETQAs establish moderation systems for accredited providers.
3. Providers establish internal moderation systems in line with the ETQAs.
4. SAQA appoints moderating bodies to assure consistency in unit standards and qualifications across one or more ETQAs.

This section will deal in particular with the internal moderation system (no. 3 above) established by providers/institutions to:

- verify that assessments are fair, valid, reliable and practicable;
- identify the need for the re-design of assessment;
- provide an appeals procedure for dissatisfied learners;

- evaluate the performance of assessors;
- provide procedures for the de-registration of unsatisfactory assessors; and
- provide feedback to NSBs on unit standards and qualifications (via the ETQA).

(SAQA, 2001: 60)

The internal moderator(s) of a provider has a very important role to play in establishing and maintaining an RPL system for the provider/institution and, for this reason, is considered to be a critical member of the team. He/she will assist in the establishment of appropriate assessment methodologies and tools, help define the assessor and evidence guides, and moderate a sample of the assessments and the assessor practice in line with the requirements of the ETQA.

The purpose is to ensure that “assessments conducted in a single learning provider are consistent, accurate and well-designed” (SAQA, 2001: 61).

The three main stages, according to the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (SAQA, 2001: 61), for internal moderation include:

i) Design

The choice and design of assessment methods and instruments are appropriate to unit standards and qualifications being assessed.

ii) Implementation

The assessment is appropriately conducted and matches the specifications of unit standards and qualifications. This includes ensuring that the appropriate arrangements have been made and that there are regular discussions among assessors.

iii) Any lessons learnt from the two previous stages are considered and the necessary changes are made.

The planning for moderation will be captured in the moderation guides. It will involve all members of the team, i.e. administrative staff, evidence facilitators, assessors and other relevant people. In Chapter 2 of this document, planning for the sector was dealt with in detail. Extracts from a table taken from the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit standards and Qualifications* (SAQA, 2001: 65) may be helpful to conceptualise this particular part of implementation:

What?	Will all registered standards be moderated? Will all candidates be moderated? If not, what percentage? Will all assessments be moderated? If not, what percentage? Will all [training] programmes be moderated?
Who?	Who will conduct the moderation? (Internal moderators, ETQA/external moderators, professional bodies?)
How?	How will moderation be done? Moderation of assessment methods, instruments and materials: – Before assessment? – Post assessment? – Both?
When?	Continuously? Monthly? Quarterly? Annually?
Cost?	Who will pay? Cost-effective ways of moderation?
Reports?	Who provides information? To whom? (Internal moderator, external moderator, ETQA?)
Evaluation?	What system will be put in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the moderation system itself?

The inter-relatedness of all the role players in the establishment of a credible RPL system is key to the success of the initiative. The following diagram highlights some of the processes:

	What?	Who is responsible?	Moderation?
Stage 1: Design	Policy and procedures	All	
	Assessment methodologies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments • Exemplars • Assessor guides • Evidence guides 	Assessors	Pre-assessment moderation of tools
	Quality assurance interventions	Moderators	Overall process
	Support structures	All	Support for candidates and staff
Stage 2: Implement	Assessment procedures	Administrative staff, evidence facilitators and assessors	Procedures in accordance with provider plans
	Assessment	Assessors	Assessment results and assessor conduct
Stage 3: Review	Policy and procedures	All	Assessment processes and procedures
	Assessment methodologies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruments • Exemplars • Assessor guides • Evidence guides 	Assessors and moderators	Assessment methodologies and instruments
	Quality assurance interventions	All	Moderation processes
Stage 4: Report	Assessment results	Assessors and moderators	Results and achievements
	Assessment instruments	Assessors and moderators	Appropriateness of instruments
	Practitioner capacity	Moderators in accordance with provider specifications	Skills of practitioners
	Feedback to NSBs regarding unit standards and qualifications	Moderators	Appropriateness of unit standards and qualifications

Summary

This chapter dealt in particular with the skills, knowledge and attitudes required of the practitioners who will be dealing with RPL candidates. These practitioners include the evidence facilitator, the assessor and the internal moderator, as well as the support staff that will, at various stages, make contact with the RPL candidate. A focus on the roles and functions of these practitioners may create the impression that RPL is highly resourced and cost intensive but, as stated in the SAQA RPL policy in terms of services and support to learners/candidates, “as far as possible, a separate infrastructure should not be established for RPL” (SAQA, 2002: 20). There is no doubt that the implementation of RPL will require the allocation of specific roles and duties and the development of expertise in this area of provisioning. It will also require the allocation of funds.

Would-be implementers of RPL will gain much more buy-in from their organisations if the benefits of the development of a credible RPL system could be incorporated into the restructuring of assessment systems per se. Lessons learnt through the establishment of RPL processes and assessment, including the quality assurance thereof, could inform the development and improvement of practices for classroom-based learning. The extent to which RPL processes and systems are detailed may have benefits for the organisational alignment with the principles and objectives of the NQF and will, in this way, represent time and resources well spent.

Chapter 4 will deal with the tools: design and moderation of assessment

Chapter 4:

The tools: Design and moderation of assessment

Introduction

The SAQA RPL policy states that the design and moderation of appropriate assessment instruments and tools “is a critical step to ensure the credibility of the assessments, and the integrity of the system” (Chapter 3: 32).

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter will provide a theoretical model for engaging with the complex issue of assessment of experiential learning against conventional unit-standard-based and non-unit-standard-based qualifications, as well as give examples and guidance as to how such learning could be assessed.

Chapter 4 of the guidelines will address the following in terms of assessment:

- the need for the clarification of the purpose and expectations of assessment in terms of the candidate within the contexts of the sector and the institutional/provider plan;
- the extent to which candidates could be involved in the choice of assessment approaches and methods, and the appeals process;
- the support structures required on the basis of the RPL implementation plan;
- the forms, quality and sources of evidence appropriate to the field of learning, level and specialisation;
- the assessment process, including a generic approach to RPL assessments;
- the assessment methodologies, tools and instruments and valid alternative methods if the aforementioned are not feasible, and exemplars of these where possible;
- the process by which the above decisions are arrived at (i.e. by making use of the ‘nested’ approach described in the draft Level Descriptors document, particularly in terms of recognition of ‘equivalence’ as opposed to direct matching against unit standards and qualification outcomes); and
- the benefits of the ‘nested’ approach to curriculum development.

The chapter will also address the moderation and review processes set up to ensure that the integrity of qualifications and the system as a whole is protected. This will include moderation and review of:

- assessment tools and instruments;
- assessor guides; and
- reporting structures.

4.1 Methods and processes of assessment

In the SAQA RPL policy, the self-audit tool in Chapter 2 of the policy (p. 25) highlights the importance of appropriate assessment processes and instruments for RPL. Consider the self-audit tool:

METHODS AND PROCESSES OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment is a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgements about a candidate's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications. This process involves the candidate and the assessor within a particular context in a transparent and collaborative manner.

	YES	NO
The purpose of assessment and the expectations of the candidate are clarified.		
Assessment plans take into account the form, quality and sources of evidence required (for example performance evidence, knowledge evidence, knowledge testimony, etc.).		
The form and quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment are established.		
The candidate is actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment is fair and transparent. Possible barriers to fair assessment are identified and addressed.		
Assessment plans indicate a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments to validate diverse types of learning.		
The choice of assessment methods is fit for purpose and ensures reliable and valid assessment outcomes.		
An appeals process is in place and made known to the candidate.		
Assessment instruments and exemplars are developed and moderated in compliance with the ETQA requirements.		
Assessment reports indicate the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome and recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or re-assessment.		
Moderation and review mechanisms are in place, including policies for verification, evaluation and quality assurance of assessments and assessment systems.		

It is through the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge that decisions are made regarding the learning of a person seeking credits against registered unit standards and qualifications. Valid, reliable and practical assessments ensure the integrity of an RPL system and could enhance assessment practice generally.