

In the words of the SAQA RPL policy:

...it should be noted that there is no fundamental difference in the assessment of previously acquired skills and knowledge and the assessment of skills and knowledge acquired through a current learning programme. The candidate seeking credits for previously acquired skills and knowledge must still comply with all the requirements as stated in unit standards and qualifications. The difference lies in the route to the assessment.

(SAQA, 2002: 8)

### 4.1.1 Purpose and expectations

In Chapter 2 of this document, the different purposes of RPL were described. These should be captured in the RPL policy of the institution/provider and be made very clear to the candidate claiming credits towards unit standards and qualifications. There is, for example, the mistaken perception that if a person has a number of years experience and has completed a number of short courses, that these could be combined to make up a qualification. The candidate should clearly understand that – if the learning achieved through such experience and through the attendance of short learning programmes meets the requirements of a registered unit standard and/or qualification – then credits could be awarded. At the same time candidates need to understand that credits are awarded for learning, not for time spent in a particular environment, and that they are always awarded through some or other form of assessment and not ad hoc. The SAQA RPL policy makes it clear that the process of RPL is about:

- Identifying what the candidate knows and can do
- Matching the candidate's skills, knowledge and experience to specific standards and the associated assessment criteria of a qualification
- Assessing the candidate against those standards
- Crediting the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past

(SAQA, 2002: 7).

It is therefore important for a candidate to be clear on what the purpose of RPL at the institution/provider will be, i.e. access, advanced standing and/or formal certification. This means that the candidate must know whether a formal, valid certificate will be issued, or whether he/she will be granted access to a formal learning programme based on the assessment of his/her prior learning and, most importantly, what the status of such credits are.

Institutions and workplaces implementing RPL must, in their planning, be clear on the following questions:

- Will these credits be transferable intra-institutionally and/or inter-institutionally?
- Will a candidate be able to use a transcript of such credits for employment or promotion purposes?
- Will an academic record be issued?
- What is the value of credits awarded?

If such matters are not clarified from the outset, candidates may feel deceived and may question the integrity and validity of the system.

#### **4.1.2 The form, quality and sources of evidence**

The form, quality and sources of evidence that will lead to the attainment of credits will depend on the purpose, outcomes and assessment criteria of the unit standards and qualifications. It is therefore critical that would-be implementers of RPL be clear on what kinds of evidence will be required to offer proof of knowledge and skills in relation to the target qualification. Implementers should also be open to taking into account evidence that does not exactly match the formal requirements for the qualification.

However, as stated in the SAQA RPL policy:

Quality of evidence relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency and currency. Particularly in RPL assessment, the latter two issues of quality are important. In the case of sufficiency, it is not only a question of whether enough evidence has been gathered. Sometimes, in an attempt to ensure rigour, assessors require too much evidence (e.g. extensive triangulation) and thus make the assessment process very onerous for candidates and for assessors. The essential reference point for 'marking' RPL is the lowest mark which enables a classroom taught candidate to 'pass'. Rarely does this mean a complete coverage of the syllabus. It would be unfair to RPL candidates to expect more than the minimum requirements for learners in full-time study.

(SAQA, 2002: 24)

With that in mind, evidence of skills, knowledge and values may be in the form of:

- certificates from previous education and training courses, including short learning programmes and skills programmes;
- licences to practice;
- professional registration;
- products of any nature relevant to the courses offered at the institution: art portfolios; publications, etc.;
- samples of completed work;
- employment related documents such as resumes, performance appraisals, etc.;
- statutory declaration outlining previous types of work and experience;
- references from current and past employers, supervisors and colleagues;
- testimonials from persons holding relevant qualifications in the area being assessed;
- photographs of completed work certified by a referee or accompanied by a statutory declaration; and
- if self-employed in the past, evidence of running a business using the skills and knowledge being claimed.

(Mays, 2002)

The examples given above represent a number of static forms of evidence that could, once authenticated (and therefore assessed), be accepted as proof of applied knowledge. However,

not all candidates will be able to produce such a range of evidence and additional forms of evidence may be required. The following table represents a number of assessment methods that can be used for RPL. Some of these methods could be used for authentication of evidence produced, but will also provide proof of learning where evidence in the form and shape of the list above cannot be produced:

Assessment Methods	Purposes and Examples
Interviews	To clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning. May be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important. (May be structured or unstructured.)
Debate	To confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject.
Presentation	To check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience.
Performance testing	To test applications of theory in a structured context in correct/safe manner.
Examination	To test concepts and basic skills and applications using practical examples.
Oral examination	To check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms.
Essay	To check the quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of the ideas.
Examples of work done or performed or designed	To check the quality of work, relevance to credit sought and authenticity of production
Portfolio	To validate applicant's learning by providing a collection of materials that reflect prior learning and achievements. Will include own work, reflections on own practice and indirect evidence from others that are qualified to comment. The portfolio will identify relevant connection between learning and the specified or unspecified credit sought.
Book review	To ensure currency and analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level.
Annotated	To illustrate the range of reading done by the applicant and ensure appropriate literature review coverage to fulfil subject requirements.
Special projects	May be used to meet a variety of purposes – to add greater currency to knowledge of skills, to extend scope of prior learning.
Reports, critiques, articles	To indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in the current debate on the subject

(Cohen, in Harris, 2000: 148–149)

These examples are not exhaustive but are useful guidelines for the development of assessment methodologies when dealing with RPL.

Other commonly used methods in a number of international contexts include:

- **United States of America:**
  - Standardised national examinations
  - Institutionally developed challenge examinations
  - National course examinations for recommendations regarding non-formal NGO/company based training
  - Individual assessment through a portfolio of evidence or oral interview
- **United Kingdom:**
  - Portfolios of evidence
  - Assigned subject-related essays
  - Challenge examinations
  - Interviews/oral examinations
  - Testimonials from supervisors
  - Projects
- **Australia:**
  - Work-experience ‘translated’ into educational outcomes
  - Validation of industry-based and in-house training programmes through an evaluation of such programmes
  - Challenge tests
  - Portfolios
- **Canada:**
  - Portfolio assessments
  - Demonstrations
  - Challenge examinations
  - Workplace training programme evaluation

It should be clear that RPL practitioners have a range of valid forms of assessment to choose from when making decisions about their preferred assessment methodologies. However, it is important to remember that assessments should be fit for purpose and a particular assessment tool should not be used where there are more efficient and practical ways to assess.

### **4.1.3 Candidate support**

The SAQA RPL policy is explicit on this particular part of the RPL process:

...the danger of underestimating the levels of disempowerment and dislocation that decades of discriminatory education and training practices had on ordinary citizens, and the unfamiliarity with formal academic study, (particularly in higher education), cannot be ignored. Therefore the support services [to RPL candidates] should consciously address the invisible barriers to successful assessment. This may include a re-alignment of existing academic development programmes to suit the needs of adult learners, advising programmes, assistance with identifying equivalencies and preparation for assessment. This may also include dealing with the very significant anxieties, traumas and non-technical barriers that arise when adult learners enter the RPL arena.

(SAQA, 2002: 20)

Learner-centredness is a key principle underpinning the NQF. Translated into candidate support, it means that advisory or other support services may need to be developed to complement the processes where appropriate evidence is identified and benchmarked and to support candidates in the preparation and planning for assessment. The extent of such support services will depend on the context. It may be possible, for example, for current student services offered by providers, to offer pre-entry advice, educational planning services and post-assessment guidance. However, where necessary, additional support must be made available.

Candidate support will also include the extent to which candidates are able to choose assessment methodologies that they feel most comfortable with. This does not mean that such alternative methodologies are in any way inferior, but that they may be less threatening to the candidate. The candidate does not have an open choice of assessment methods, but alternatives to a particular method could be provided, (i.e. instead of a major project, a number of smaller assignments, culminating in the achievement of the outcome could be used, or an oral examination could replace a formal written examination).

#### 4.1.4 The assessment process and appeals procedures

In Chapter 6 of the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (p. 49-58), a generic assessment process is proposed. The suggested generic process in the SAQA RPL policy (p. 33) mirrors this approach. All assessments should therefore encapsulate the basic processes set out below:

- **The preparatory phase**

In the preparatory phase, practitioners (including people responsible for advising and for assessing) are required to familiarise themselves with unit standards and qualifications that they will be assessing. This includes being very clear on the purpose, outcomes, assessment criteria and other relevant information that will impact on the design of the assessment instrument.

During this phase, the practitioner makes decisions about the most appropriate assessment methods, instruments, type and amount of evidence required, as well as alternative methods which may emanate from discussions with candidates.

It is also during this phase that moderation of the assessment methods and instruments take place. Moderation could take place through discussions with other specialists in the area.

The type and extent of pre-assessment, assessment and post-assessment support for candidates are decided and described.

- **The assessment phase**

The assessment phase again is divided into four stages:

- **The planning for assessment**

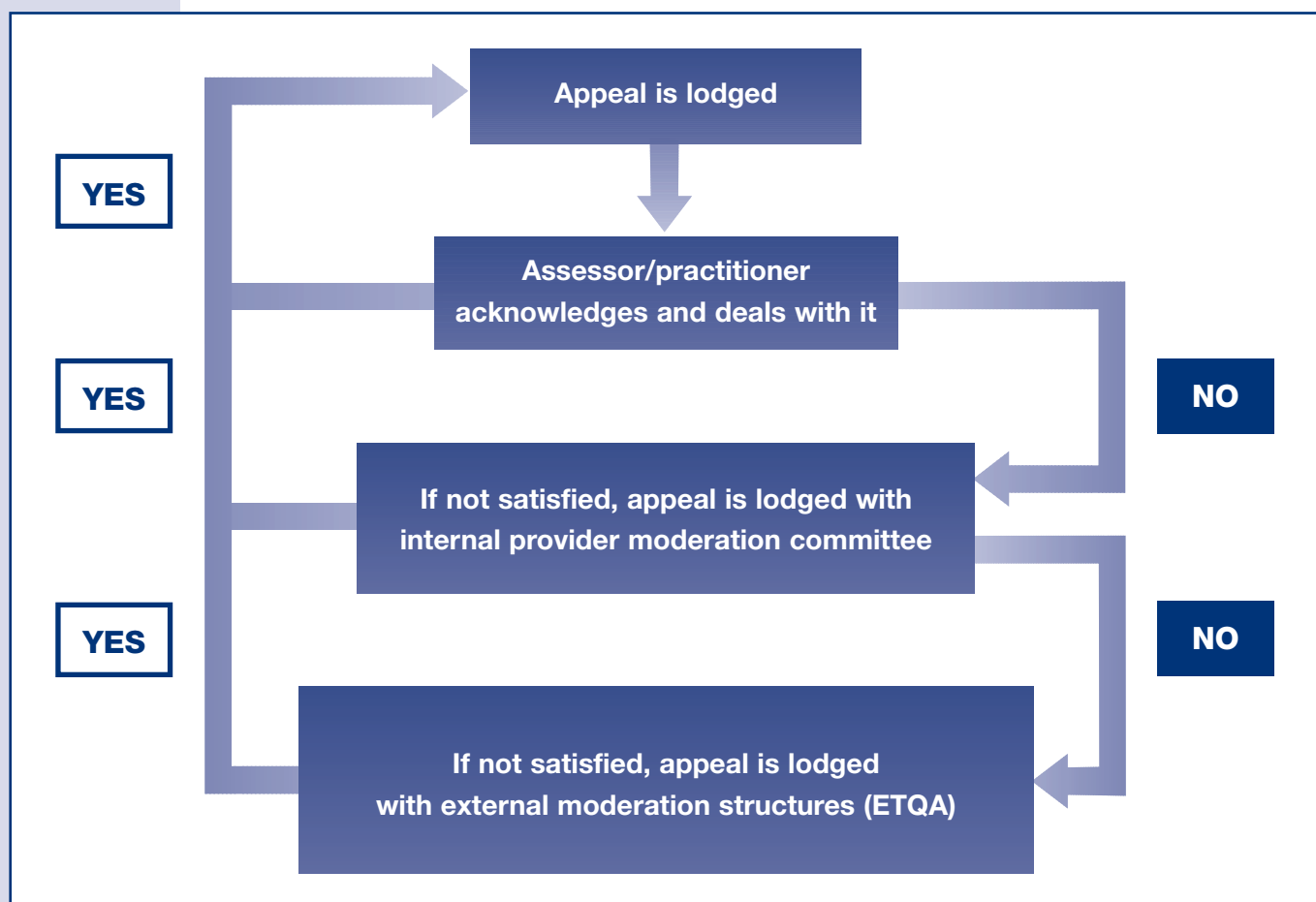
The practitioner informs the candidate about the requirements, discusses the forms and

type of evidence required, and reaches agreement on the assessment instruments to be used, the standard and level of performance expected, and highlights the support structures in place to assist the candidate in the collection of evidence. The candidate is also informed about the provider's appeals process should that be required. At this point, the assessor and the candidate may choose to use alternative forms of assessment, where appropriate.

- **The assessment**  
The assessment is conducted in an appropriate and enabling environment.
- **The judgement**  
A judgement is made in accordance with the pre-agreed criteria.
- **Feedback**  
Feedback includes a discussion of the results of the assessment, guidance, further planning and post-assessment support (if required).

An appeals process could be initiated at this stage. The structure and procedures of the institution/provider should be available. A generic appeals process is discussed in the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (p.54). Consider the following flow diagram:

Example of an appeals procedure:



## 4.2 A working example

RPL will take place in a variety of contexts. It is therefore impossible to include examples of all the different environments. However, an approach to the establishment of assessment methods and instruments may be generalised. This section will explore a process that will facilitate decisions regarding what should be assessed when a person requests RPL, and how the assessment(s) could take place. It starts off with the broadest possible understanding of what a qualification should enable learners to do, and then progressively moves towards an understanding of the area of specialisation that will tell practitioners in that particular field of learning that a candidate has met all (or part of) the requirements for the qualification.

Each institution/provider will have its own learning programme that will progressively assist learners to achieve the overall purpose of the qualification. The extent to which such learning programmes differ between institutions/providers will facilitate or inhibit the award of credits towards a particular qualification and the subsequent transfer of such credits intra-institutionally and inter-institutionally. It should be noted that a registered qualification does not contain the learning programme of a particular provider, but rather contains a broad description of what a learner can expect to be able to do on successful completion of a particular programme. Where the point of departure is the outcomes or results of learning, rather than the actual input in terms of the learning programme, establishing equivalence, rather than literal matching with subjects and modules, will become possible (Heyns, 2004). To describe the approach, a hypothetical qualification, B.Com. (Tourism Management) will be used.

### 4.2.1 The 'nested' approach to standards-generation and qualifications specification

The 'nested' approach to standards-generation and qualifications specification in the draft New Academic Policy<sup>8</sup> (CHE, 2001: 45) is useful to understand the **broadest to narrowest** approach. This approach was not developed with RPL in mind, but could be helpful in the establishment of what should be assessed when RPL is requested. Consider the diagram:



<sup>8</sup> As previously noted, it is the principle of the 'broadest to the narrowest' approach to determine appropriate, fit-for-purpose assessment that is the point of discussion, not the draft New Academic Policy.

**Level descriptor: LEVEL 6**

The description of what a learner should be able to do at Level 6 of the NQF, is as follows:

Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
<p>Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a well-rounded and systematic knowledge base in one or more disciplines/fields and a detailed knowledge of some specialist areas;</li> <li>an informed understanding of one or more discipline's/field's terms, rules, concepts, principles and theories; an ability to map new knowledge onto a given body of theory; an acceptance of a multiplicity of 'right' answers;</li> <li>effective selection and application of a discipline's/field's essential procedures, operations and techniques; an understanding of the central methods of enquiry in a discipline/field; a knowledge of at least one other discipline's/field's mode of enquiry;</li> <li>an ability to deal with unfamiliar concrete and abstract problems and issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments;</li> <li>well-developed information retrieval skills; critical analysis and synthesis of quantitative and/or qualitative data; presentation skills following prescribed formats, using Information Technology (IT) skills effectively; and</li> <li>an ability to present and communicate information and opinions in well-structured arguments, showing an awareness of audience and using academic/professional discourse appropriately.</li> </ol>	<p>a capacity to operate in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts, requiring responsibility and initiative; a capacity to self-evaluate and identify and address own learning needs; an ability to interact effectively in a learning group.</p>

A careful consideration of the level, breadth and depth of learning required at a first-degree level hints at what should be assessed to determine whether a candidate meets the requirements for credits on this level. These include:

- detailed knowledge of the area of specialisation;
- familiarity with the area of specialisation's terms, rules, concepts and principles;
- application of the area of specialisation's procedures, operations and techniques;
- the ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts;
- IT and information-retrieval skills; and
- presentation and communication skills.

In addition, it is expected of a successful learner at this level to take responsibility for his/her learning and to reflect on his/her own practices.

Drilling down into the next level requires considering the qualification type; in this case a General Bachelor's Degree.

### Qualification type: General Bachelor's Degree

The description of what a learner is expected to be able to do at the level of a General Bachelor's Degree is captured as follows in the draft New Academic Policy (Chapter 6):

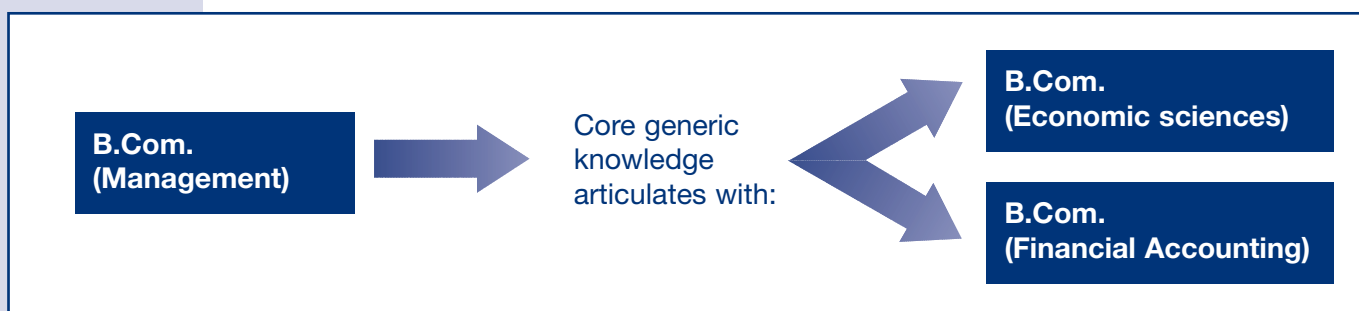
The purpose of the General Bachelor's Degree is to develop graduates who have benefited from a well-rounded, broad education and who can fully demonstrate the capabilities described in the Level 6 descriptor, including the demonstration of initiative and responsibility in an academic or professional context. A Bachelor's Degree programme in the General Track consists of at least one major or cumulative specialisation, and some exposure to other disciplines. This means that graduates should have studied at least one discipline/field progressively throughout the programme to the point where they have attained some depth of knowledge and expertise in the area, as well as gaining a broad comparative knowledge.

As in the case of the Level Descriptors for Level 6 of the NQF, the above qualification description indicates what should be assessed; in particular: the extent to which a candidate is conversant in an area of specialisation, e.g. Management in the Tourism industry.

The description also gives an indication of the relative weighting that should be given to the different parts of the qualification; i.e. the 'majors' will carry more weight in terms of the overall assessment than the 'other disciplines' learners are exposed to in attaining the qualification.

### Designated variant: Bachelor of Commerce

The designated variant makes it possible to determine and define articulation possibilities. All degrees known as a 'Bachelor of Commerce', for example, will have as its core learning, subjects/modules dealing with economic and business sciences. Where credits are awarded for this part of the qualification, an RPL candidate could articulate those credits with a number of qualifications in and outside of the institution/provider. (The structure of a qualification, as described in the NSB Regulations, will also assist in determining the relative importance of a particular part of a qualification in terms of its credit values and levels of attainment.) Consider the example used in Chapter 2 of this document for a B.Com. (Management) degree:



### **Qualification specialisation: B.Com. (Tourism Management)**

The qualification specialisation is the final level of the ‘nested approach’. By understanding how the qualification fits into an overall structure, and the type, breadth and depth of learning required to achieve a qualification at a particular level, a holistic and integrated approach to assessment of prior learning can be developed. In terms of the hypothetical qualification used as an example, the purpose, exit-level outcomes and associated assessment criteria will inform the detail of the assessment within the broader conceptualisation of a qualification at this level. The purpose for this qualification could read:

Bachelor of Commerce: Tourism Management

#### **Purpose:**

The overall purpose of this qualification is to develop future managers and entrepreneurs in the tourism sphere.

The exit-level outcome(s) for this qualification could read:

#### **Exit-level outcome(s):**

After completion of the B.Com. (Tourism Management) programme the graduate will have the competence to operate and/or manage any of the key functional areas of a tourism business and be in the position to become an entrepreneur in the tourism sphere.

The purpose and exit-level outcome(s) highlights the core of the qualification, i.e. **management** and **entrepreneurship**. Assessment should therefore focus, in keeping with the level, breadth and depth of learning required for this level of qualification, on the ability to manage and the entrepreneurial skills of the candidate. The assessment of these aspects will carry the most weight in terms of the overall assessment.

In order to establish what should be assessed to determine whether the candidate meets the requirements for the qualification, the first question should be:

#### **How will we (the practitioners) know that a person can manage key functional areas of a tourism business?**

In the example in Chapter 2 of this document, some answers emerge:

*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 the future etc).*

The second question, in terms of this qualification could be:

**How will we know that a person is in the position to become an entrepreneur in the tourism sphere?**

Possible answers emerging from this question are:

*Entrepreneurial abilities include:*

- *the identification of a niche market;*
- *the identification of the resources and tools required to start a business in the tourism sphere;*
- *the development of marketing material and tools; and*
- *the implementation of a marketing strategy, etc.*

Once practitioners are clear on what would constitute applied knowledge within the framework of the qualification, decisions regarding assessment methods and instruments could be made. The following table takes this example further:

What is to be assessed?	Possible assessment instruments	Links to the qualification descriptor	Links to the level descriptor
The ability to manage, i.e. Fiscal management; Drawing up a budget; Resource management; Business plan, etc.	Portfolio of evidence containing authenticated documents proving competence in management; Projects, e.g. to draw up a business plan; Assignments, e.g. to indicate how resources will be managed; Case studies, e.g. how knowledge could be applied in unfamiliar contexts; Challenge examination, e.g. to assess underpinning theoretical knowledge of economic and business sciences.	The extent to which a candidate is conversant in an area of specialisation, e.g. Management in the Tourism industry.	Detailed knowledge of the area of specialisation; Familiarity with the area of specialisation's terms, rules, concepts and principles; Application of the area of specialisation's procedures, operations and techniques; The ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts.

What is to be assessed?	Possible assessment instruments	Links to the qualification descriptor	Links to the level descriptor
Entrepreneurial abilities, i.e. Identification of target market; The identification of resources and tools to start a business; The development of a marketing strategy; etc.	A major project including the assessment of all the aspects mentioned; Portfolio of evidence with authenticated documents proving competence; Presentation e.g. of a marketing plan; Challenge examination, e.g. to assess underpinning knowledge of marketing.	The extent to which a candidate is conversant in an area of specialisation, e.g. Entrepreneurship	Detailed knowledge of the area of specialisation; Familiarity with the area of specialisation's terms, rules, concepts and principles; Application of the area of specialisation's procedures, operations and techniques; The ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts; Presentation and communication skills.
Other requirements, e.g. Knowledge of the tourism sphere; IT usage and retrieval of information; Experiential learning in a tourism business;	Challenge examination, e.g. to assess knowledge of historical and/or cultural and natural sites suitable for tourism; Industry-based certificates, e.g. for IT skills; Logbooks e.g. for practical experience in a workplace; Testimonials and references in terms of work responsibilities.	Exposure to other related disciplines	IT and information retrieval skills

Once the practitioner has decided which assessment instruments to use, the level and extent of support that may be required by the candidates also becomes clear. A portfolio of evidence, for example, is a very common method used internationally for RPL. However, assembling a portfolio is, in itself, a hard-won skill, particularly if it relates to reflecting on one's own practices. If a portfolio of evidence is the most appropriate form of assessment, then the necessary support to develop such a portfolio must be built into the support structures for applicants.

The example discussed above is by no means complete; it attempts rather to facilitate the development of an approach for RPL practice – both for qualifications based on unit standards and for qualifications not based on unit standards.

This approach will also facilitate inter-institutional and/or regional collaboration because the **focus is on the outcome or results of learning**. This in turn will greatly facilitate the articulation and transfer of credits intra- and inter-institutionally (Heyns, 2004).

This approach is useful not only for RPL practice, but could increasingly be used for curriculum development.

### 4.3 RPL and curriculum development

The nested approach used in this document “highlights the extent to which the education and training system is changing from an inputs-based system to an outcomes-based system. It reflects how assessment and assessment practice will increasingly inform the development of curricula.” (SAQA, 2002: 29) It should be clear that this approach requires a careful analysis of the knowledge, skills and values that will indicate applied knowledge and competence in a particular field of learning. The set of questions suggested in Chapter 2 then becomes relevant in terms of the ‘negotiation of two worlds – the world of experience and the world of the academic’ (Osman, et al., 2001), i.e.:

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

If this approach is used to gain an understanding of how knowledge acquired outside of formal institutions/providers may be credited against the requirements of formal qualifications, the curricula and qualifications will increasingly be enriched and informed by what is relevant in the workplace.

The SAQA RPL policy proposes the following set of quality criteria in this regard:

#### RPL and Curriculum Development

Assessment and RPL practice increasingly inform the development of new standards, qualifications, learning programmes and curricula. Providers increasingly use methods of instruction and delivery to provide curricula to meet the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational needs of learners

	YES	NO
Learning programmes increasingly take into account the nature and form of knowledge produced in previously excluded constituencies and locations, e.g. indigenous knowledge, women’s knowledge, workers’ knowledge.		
The curriculum increasingly incorporates indigenous and other knowledge forms to reflect the diversity of needs and goals of the learner population.		
The design of learning programmes indicates how candidates’ prior knowledge has been affirmed and taken into account.		
The curriculum is sufficiently open-ended to allow for flexible entry and exit points to enhance access and the achievement of learning goals.		
Emerging trends from assessment and RPL practice, where these have implications for modification and redesign of unit standards and qualifications, are forwarded to the appropriate bodies.		
Where candidates demonstrate knowledge that does not easily fit existing unit standards or exit level outcomes, credit equivalencies are established in consultation with subject experts and relevant ETQAs.		

## 4.4 Moderation and review

The notion of moderation of assessment instruments is not new to education and training. The setting of examination papers, the marking of papers, and examination results have always been moderated. However, increasingly, institutions/providers are making use of alternative assessment methodologies, in keeping with the principle that continuous assessment – rather than one final summative assessment – is a better indicator of applied knowledge. This calls for improved moderation systems, which takes into account the form and type of instruments used, the guidelines for the appropriate use of these, and consistent interpretation of what should be assessed.

In the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (SAQA, 2001: 59), the purpose of moderation is discussed:

Moderation ensures that people who are being assessed are assessed in a consistent, accurate and well-designed manner. It ensures that all assessors who assess a particular [set of] unit standards or qualification, are using comparable assessment methods and are making similar and consistent judgements about learners' performance.

Institutions/providers are responsible for, and integral to, a moderation system, which emanates from the ETQA, but is practiced at the level of the institution/provider (referred to as 'internal moderation' in the *Criteria and Guidelines for the Assessment of NQF registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* – p. 61).

The roles and function of the internal moderation system are described as follows:

“Accredited providers should have individuals that manage their internal moderation systems.

These internal moderators should:

- Establish systems to standardise assessment, including the plans for internal moderation.
- Monitor consistency of assessment records.
- Through sampling, check the design of assessment materials for appropriateness before they are used, monitor assessment processes, check candidates evidence, check the results and decisions of assessors for consistency.
- Co-ordinate assessor meeting.
- Liaise with external moderators.
- Provide appropriate and necessary support, advice and guidance to assessors”.

The internal moderation discussed above does not apply only to RPL. It is a requirement in terms of the accreditation of institutions/providers and will apply to all assessments conducted by the provider. This will ensure not only that RPL processes and assessments are valid, but also that the overall assessment processes of the institution/provider and the sector are enhanced.

## Summary

In an outcomes-based approach to education and training, the assessment of the results of learning is a key indicator of the success of the learning and teaching that precede the assessment. Assessment of applied knowledge and competence (the results of learning) provides information on a number of levels:

- The learner is informed about his/her level of attainment in relation to pre-agreed requirements for the qualification.
- The Education and Training (ETD) practitioner derives information about his/her teaching.
- The education and training system is informed about the strengths and weaknesses in the system.

In order to provide valid and credible information, assessment practices must be above reproach. This is true for the assessment of learning in classroom-based environments, as well as assessment of prior learning.

To prevent assessment from becoming a purely technical application, a holistic approach is the most appropriate; i.e. an approach that acknowledges that learning takes place within a variety of contexts (which are not necessarily linked to each other) and, therefore cannot be neatly packaged in the form of modules or subjects, and that assessment is also about the preparation and support required to reach the point of assessment. With this in mind, this chapter has tried to highlight that RPL assessment is not only about the act of assessment, i.e. writing a test, demonstrating a skill, but also about capacitating people to be assessed, so that they can provide evidence of their applied knowledge.

The chapter also highlights the critical necessity to understand why we assess (i.e. to determine applied knowledge), what we assess (i.e. what will tell us that a learner has achieved the applied knowledge), and how we assess (i.e. making use of the most appropriate methodologies and instruments) within a broader framework. In this way assessment becomes an important mechanism by means of which we can develop improved ways of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 will deal with quality management for RPL.