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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) MECHANISM: PROCESS AND TOOLKIT

Signatories

The signatories hereof, confirm acceptance of the contents, recommendation, and adoption hereof.

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CO-AUTHOR	Specialist: Capacitation and Assessments	Sipho Mkhabela	
CO-AUTHOR	Senior Manager: Quality Assurance	Tebello Mokoena	
RECOMMENDER AND CUSTODIAN	Executive Manager: Operations	Liesel Köstlich	
APPROVER SERVICES SETA	Acting Chief Executive Officer	Sibusiso Dhladhla	
APPROVER QCTO			

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Authors title, name and contact details	Specialist: Capacitation and Assessments – Sipho Mkhabela siphom@serviceseta.org.za			
	Senior Manager: Quality Assurance – Tebello Mokoena tebellom@serviceseta.org.za			
Owner title, name and contact details	Executive Manager: Operations – Liesel Köstlich lieselk@serviceseta.org.za			
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1. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

#	Term/Acronym	Description
1.1	Access	The opportunity to pursue education and training, including qualifications, part-qualifications, professional designations, workplace opportunities and career progression
1.2	Accreditation	The official approval granted by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) to a Skills Development Provider (SDP) or Assessment Centre (AC) to offer or assess qualifications, part-qualifications or skills programmes
1.3	Assessment	<p>The systematic process of identifying, collecting, and interpreting evidence to determine whether a candidate has demonstrated the required knowledge, practical skills, and workplace competence for a qualification or part-qualification.</p> <p>Assessment may draw on formal, non-formal and informal learning and may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formative assessment, which provides feedback to guide further learning; and • Summative assessment, which evaluates learning already achieved to make a final judgement of competence
1.4	Assessment Centre (AC)	A facility accredited to conduct the External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA) for Occupational Qualifications (OQs), using standardised assessment instruments approved by the QCTO
1.5	Assessment Criteria	The standards used to judge evidence, recognise learning achievements and certify competence
1.6	Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)	A body delegated by the QCTO to manage external assessment and quality assurance for OQs. The Services SETA is the AQP for qualifications within its scope
1.7	Assessment Site	A QCTO-approved site used under the supervision of an accredited AC to conduct practical components of the EISA, where real or simulated occupational environments are required
1.8	Candidate	An individual who seeks access to Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) on the basis of relevant work experience, informal or non-formal learning. A candidate is not considered a learner for purposes of structured training, but is assessed against the requirements of a registered occupational qualification to determine credit achievement, competence or eligibility for progression to further learning or the EISA
1.9	Certification	The formal recognition of a registered OQ or part-qualification awarded to a successful learner by the QCTO

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#	Term/Acronym	Description
1.10	Competence	The ability to demonstrate knowledge, skills and values successfully against prescribed criteria
1.11	Credits	A measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification or part-qualification, where one (1) credit is equal to ten (10) notional hours of learning
1.12	Credit Accumulation	The totalling of credits towards a qualification or a part-qualification
1.13	External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA)	A single national assessment which integrates the knowledge, practical and or work experience to assess the competence of a learner against the stated exit level outcomes of the occupational qualification, or part qualification leading to the awarding of an occupational qualification. Assessment tools used to conduct EISA are developed by Quality Partners (QPs) and are approved by the QCTO
1.14	Formal Final Summative Assessment (FFSA)	The final assessment conducted at the end of a learning cycle or RPL process to determine whether competence has been achieved in the form of the Statement of Results (SoRs) for EISA readiness
1.15	Informal Learning	Unstructured, unplanned, experiential learning that occurs naturally during daily activities without a curriculum or facilitator
1.16	Learning Programme (LP)	A formal structured programme and work experience that develops knowledge, skills and competencies which culminates in a part or full qualification and provides practical exposure to the workplace, increasing prospects of employability
1.17	Mentor	A person with expertise, qualifications and/or industry experience who supports and guides learners or candidates during workplace learning or RPL processes to <i>mentor learners</i> and provide support to learners during their workplace experience learning
1.18	National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	A national system for classifying, registering and publishing quality-assured qualifications and part-qualifications recognised in South Africa maintained by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
1.19	Non-formal Learning	Structured learning that takes place outside the formal education system, but still has a clear curriculum, facilitator, objectives, and outcomes
1.20	Occupational Qualification (OQ)	A qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession, consisting of knowledge, practical skills and workplace experience components, and requiring an EISA or trade test. For certain OQs, workplace experience may be substituted with approved simulated or mentored learning interventions
1.21	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF)	The sub-framework of qualifications developed and managed by the QCTO
1.22	Part-qualification	A registered assessed unit of learning with a defined outcome that forms part of a qualification on the NQF

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#	Term/Acronym	Description
1.23	Qualification	A registered national qualification comprising planned learning outcomes with defined purpose and exit level outcomes, providing applied competence and a basis for further learning, certified by a recognised body
1.24	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)	A Quality Council (QC) established in terms of the Skills Development Act to manage the QQSF and ensure the quality of OQs, assessment and certification
1.25	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	The principles and processes whereby a person's prior learning, formal, non-formal or informal is made visible, mediated and assessed for purposes of access, credit recognition, certification or progression
1.26	Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)	Established to research demand and supply of skills within sectors, and fund, facilitate and quality assure skills development as primary intermediaries between the world of work (demand) and the world of education (supply)
1.27	Skills Development Provider (SDP)	A legally established institution accredited to deliver knowledge, practical or workplace components of OQs
1.28	Skills Programmes	Short occupationally focused programmes that contribute credits toward a registered qualification
1.29	Statement of Achievement (SoA)	A document issued by the AQP confirming EISA results for components of an Occupational Qualification and forming part of the certification process
1.30	Statement of Results (SoRs)	A formal document issued by the SDP confirming achievement of modules or components of an OQ, valid for a period not exceeding 24 months, and used to support EISA readiness
1.31	South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)	The statutory body that oversees implementation of the NQF, including registration, articulation and quality assurance of qualifications
1.32	Sub-Framework of the NQF	One of three coordinated qualifications sub-frameworks which make up the South African NQF as a single integrated system, namely: The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GEFETQSF), the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSf)

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1.33	Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)	An individual recognised by the AQP for expertise in a specific field or occupation, and deemed competent to facilitate, assess, moderate, mentor or support quality assurance functions. Assessors without RPL experience should be mentored by experienced RPL Assessors
1.34	Workplace	A site approved for workplace experience learning where learners or candidates are exposed to real or simulated conditions aligned to the requirements of the OQ

2. PREAMBLE

The Services SETA is mandated by the Skills Development Act to promote skills development within the services sector, including funding and facilitating Learning Programmes and quality assuring learner assessments. As an Assessment Quality Partner (AQP), the Services SETA is delegated by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) to implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for Occupational Qualifications (OQs) in a manner that promotes access, progression, redress and lifelong learning.

RPL for OQs should be supported by an approved RPL Mechanism which consists of the RPL Process, set out herein, and the RPL Toolkit, annexures hereto, used during screening, assessment and decision-making.

3. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Mechanism is to establish a standardised operational framework for the implementation of RPL for OQs within the Services SETA scope. It provides direction on the process, documentation, quality assurance and responsibilities involved in RPL, ensuring that prior learning is recognised consistently and credibly.

The Mechanism enables candidates to have their prior learning assessed for credit towards OQs, accumulate credits toward a qualification or part-qualification, even where full competence or EISA readiness has not yet been achieved; and access further learning or progress to the External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA) when all required competencies have been met.

4. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

This Mechanism applies to:

- 4.1 All OQs and part-qualifications within the scope of the Services SETA where RPL is permitted.
- 4.2 Employers, SDPs, Assessors, Moderators, mentors/advisors, labour/trade union representatives, RPL candidates and the Services SETA.
- 4.3 RPL for credits and RPL for progression to EISA where relevant.
- 4.4 Employed and Unemployed RPL candidates with the requisite and relevant work experience.

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5. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Mechanism are to:

- 5.1 Ensure consistent and credible RPL implementation.
- 5.2 Clarify the RPL process and documentation requirements.
- 5.3 Define the roles and responsibilities of all RPL role-players.
- 5.4 Ensure fairness, transparency and reliability in RPL assessment.
- 5.5 Promote access, progression and redress for individuals with relevant experience.
- 5.6 Support credit accumulation for OQs and part-qualifications, by recognising occupational competence acquired through non-formal, informal or experiential learning.

6. PRINCIPLES

RPL must be implemented in accordance with the following principles:

- 6.1 Fairness, transparency and access.
- 6.2 The use of evidence that is valid, authentic, current and sufficient.
- 6.3 Alignment to the curriculum and assessment specifications of the OQ.
- 6.4 Provision of advising, mediation and learner support where required.
- 6.5 Recognition of learning gained through formal, non-formal and informal means.
- 6.6 Contribution to transformation, redress and lifelong learning.

7. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

7.1 RPL Candidate

The RPL candidate should provide evidence of prior learning aligned to exit level outcomes, participate in all stages of the RPL process, complete assessments and undertake gap learning where required.

7.2 Employer

The Employer must support employees to access RPL opportunities, release them for assessment where required and provide workplace evidence to support the RPL process.

7.3 Support Representative

An RPL support representative may be a trade union representative, colleague, or any designated person able to support and validate aspects of the candidate's workplace competence. The representative plays a facilitative role in identifying and recruiting suitable candidates for RPL, mobilising participation, and promoting awareness and understanding of the RPL opportunity. They also guide candidates on their rights and responsibilities, and strengthen communication and support between the workplace, the SDP and the candidate throughout the RPL process.

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7.4 Skills Development Provider (SDP)

SDPs accredited for the full OQ may implement RPL for that qualification. The SDP should coordinate the RPL process, ensure that RPL candidates meet the minimum work experience requirements for enrolment, use approved RPL instruments, appoint qualified Assessors, maintain quality assurance practices and develop and implement a gap training plan.

7.5 Assessor

The Assessor, a Services SETA/AQP registered SME, should evaluate evidence, conduct assessments and make competence decisions in accordance with the curriculum requirements and Qualification Assessment Specifications (QAS). Assessors that do not have work experience in RPL should be mentored by a registered Assessor with RPL experience.

7.6 Workplace Mentor

The Workplace Mentor, a Services SETA/AQP registered SME, should support the candidate, assist with workplace evidence to confirm the RPL candidate's competency, and ensure alignment between workplace tasks and qualification requirements where relevant.

7.7 Services SETA/AQP

The Services SETA must guide and quality assure RPL ensuring that implementation meets quality standards and that decisions are fair, valid and reliable. The Services SETA must approve assessment instruments, manage external moderation and verify candidate readiness for EISA.

7.8 Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)

The QCTO oversees the quality assurance of RPL for Occupational Qualifications and issues certification following successful completion of the EISA.

8. THE RPL PROCESS

8.1 Step 1: Pre-Screening and Initial Consultation

The SDP or Employer should conduct an initial consultation to explain eligibility criteria, evidence requirements, RPL stages, timelines and documentation requirements. The candidate should be advised of the purpose and outcomes of RPL.

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8.2 Step 2: Application and Registration

Candidates should complete the RPL Application Form and submit required documentation. Once documentation is complete, the SDP should register the candidate on the appropriate learner management system.

8.3 Step 3: Screening and Evaluation of Evidence

A registered Assessor should evaluate the initial evidence for completeness, relevance and alignment to the outcomes, modules and assessment criteria of the OQ or part-qualification.

8.4 Step 4: Assessment and Gap Analysis

The Assessor should conduct competency conversations, workplace or simulated demonstrations and/or written assessments according to the QAS and curriculum. Gaps between existing competence and the qualification requirements should be identified and documented.

8.5 Step 5: Gap Training Plan and Implementation

Where gaps exist, the SDP should prepare a targeted Gap Training Plan. Gap training should normally not exceed 8 weeks, equating to approximately 32-40 credits (320-400 notional hours). The plan should specify outstanding credits, required learning, notional hours and evidence to be generated. Candidates Should complete the prescribed learning before progressing to the next step.

8.6 Step 6: Feedback and Decision-Making

The Assessor should provide written feedback, complete the RPL Assessment Report and recommend one of the following:

- full competence.
- partial competence with credit accumulation, or
- additional learning required.

Credits achieved Should be recorded in a Statement of Results (SoRs) issued by the SDP or AQP depending on the qualification.

8.7 Step 7: Moderation (Services SETA/AQP)

The Services SETA Moderator must verify the assessment process and confirm that assessment decisions are fair, valid, reliable and aligned to QCTO requirements. A Moderation Report must be completed.

8.8 Step 8: Final Verification and Endorsement (Services SETA/AQP)

The Services SETA must review the assessment and moderation outcomes and endorse candidates who meet the requirements for EISA readiness. Verification must confirm compliance with the curriculum, QAS and RPL Mechanism.

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8.9 Step 9: Communication of Result

The SDP should communicate assessment outcomes in writing to the candidate. This communication should include:

- credits achieved (via the SoRs).
- outstanding requirements.
- guidance on progression or credit accumulation pathways.

8.10 Step 10: EISA Registration

The SDP should register EISA-ready candidates with the QCTO. The submission should include:

- Statement of Results (SoRs).
- the RPL Assessment Report.
- the Services SETA Moderation Report.
- any required supporting evidence.

8.11 Step 11: Conducting EISA

RPL candidates must sit for the EISA at an accredited Assessment Centre (AC) or approved Assessment Site in accordance with QCTO requirements.

8.12 Step 12: EISA Marking and Moderation

The AQP must coordinate EISA marking and moderation. Results should be submitted to the QCTO for verification and approval.

8.13 Step 13: Certification

Candidates who meet all requirements and pass the EISA should be awarded the Occupational Certificate by the QCTO. Statements of Achievement (SoA) may be issued by the AQP for component achievements.

8.14 Step 14: Record-Keeping and Reporting

All RPL documentation should be securely stored by the SDP and Services SETA in compliance with the Protection Of Personal Information Act (POPIA) and applicable record-keeping regulations. Records should be accessible for verification, moderation and audit.

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND MONITORING

- 9.1 RPL implementation must comply with qualification requirements and quality assurance standards.
- 9.2 The SDP should ensure that assessments are conducted by competent and registered Assessors.
- 9.3 Moderation must take place as required for OQs.
- 9.4 The Services SETA must monitor RPL programmes and verify compliance.

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9.5 A close-out review should be conducted for each RPL programme.

10. EISA READINESS AND PROGRESSION

- 10.1 Candidates who achieve all required RPL competencies must be declared EISA-ready.
- 10.2 The SDP should compile the EISA readiness submission in the QCTO prescribed format.
- 10.3 The Services SETA should verify readiness of submitted documentation to the QCTO.
- 10.4 Candidates should complete the EISA in accordance with applicable procedures.
- 10.5 Credits achieved through RPL should be recorded, and candidates who achieve partial competence should be awarded applicable credits and may undertake further learning to complete outstanding modules.

11. COMPLAINTS MANAGEMENT

- 11.1 Complaints about RPL implementation should be submitted in writing to the Services SETA.
- 11.2 Complaints should include supporting evidence.
- 11.3 The Services SETA must acknowledge and respond within a reasonable timeframe.

12. APPEALS PROCESS

- 12.1 An RPL candidate who disagrees with an assessment decision may lodge an appeal. Appeals should relate to procedural fairness, evidence evaluation, assessor judgement, or administrative error.
- 12.2 The appeals process consists of three levels of escalation:

Level 1: Appeal to the Skills Development Provider (SDP)

- The candidate should submit a written appeal to the SDP within **5 Working Days** of receiving the assessment outcome.
- The SDP should acknowledge receipt within **2 Working Days**.
- The SDP should appoint an independent Assessor or internal review panel to reconsider the matter and issue a written decision within **10 Working Days** of receipt of the appeal.
- If the candidate is not satisfied with the outcome at Level 1, they may escalate the matter to the Services SETA.

Level 2: Appeal to the Services SETA (AQP)

- The candidate should escalate the appeal to the Services SETA within **5 Working Days** of receiving the Level 1 outcome.
- The Services SETA must acknowledge receipt within **2 Working Days**.
- The Services SETA must refer the matter to a RPL Appeal Panel appointed by the AQP. The panel must review all assessment and moderation records and issue a written decision within **15 Working Days** of referral.

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- If the candidate remains dissatisfied, they may escalate the matter to the QCTO in accordance with national procedures.

Level 3: Appeal to the QCTO

- The candidate should submit the Level 3 appeal to the QCTO within **10 Working Days** of receiving the Level 2 decision.
- The QCTO should handle the appeal in accordance with its national appeal procedures and issue a final decision. The QCTO decision is final and binding.

12.3 The SDP, Services SETA and QCTO should maintain complete and accurate records of appeal submissions, decisions and supporting documentation for audit and quality assurance purposes.

13. PROTECTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION

- 13.1 All personal information collected for the RPL process should be processed in accordance with the POPIA.
- 13.2 All parties should ensure that personal data is stored securely and used only for its intended purpose.
- 13.3 Candidate information should not be disclosed without consent except where required by law.

14. RECORD-KEEPING REQUIREMENTS

- 14.1 The SDP should maintain all RPL assessment documentation for the period of 5 years as prescribed by the QCTO.
- 14.2 The Services SETA must maintain programme-level RPL documentation for auditing and reporting purposes.
- 14.3 All records should be accessible for verification, moderation and audit.

15. REVIEW

- 15.1 This Mechanism shall be reviewed annually or earlier if required by changes in national policy, QCTO requirements or Services SETA processes.
- 15.2 The Executive Manager: Operations is responsible for initiating the review of this Mechanism.

16. REFERENCES

- 16.1 Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, as amended.
- 16.2 Skills Development Levies Act 9 of 1999, as amended.
- 16.3 SAQA National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL (2019).
- 16.4 QCTO Assessment Policy (2021).
- 16.5 Services SETA Discretionary Grants Policy.
- 16.6 Services SETA Employer Funded Learning Programme Policy.
- 16.7 Workplace-Based Learning Programme Agreement Regulations (2018).
- 16.8 SAQA Registered Occupational Qualification Curriculum Documents.

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16.9 Qualification Assessment Specifications (QAS) for SAQA Registered Occupational Qualifications.

ANNEXURES

- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 01_Pre-screening Form
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 02_Assessment Matrix (Modules)
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 03_Mapping Matrix (Exit Level Outcomes)
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 04_Gap Implementation Plan
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 05_Mentorship Report
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 06_Final Assessment Report
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 07_Assessor Assessment Review
- RPL Toolkit - Instrument 08_Candidate Assessment Practices Review