CHAPTER 2:
PLANNING - THE DEVELOPMENT OF SECTOR/CONTEXT-SPECIFIC PLANS

Introduction

Chapter 2 of the guideline document deals with the planning of RPL initiatives on a macro and micro level, i.e. at the level of the ETQA in conjunction with its constituent providers, and at the level of the provider[5].

Purpose of this chapter

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

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

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

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

In addition, based on the context, planning for:

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

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[5] The term 'provider' is used in accordance with the official understanding of an education and training provider, i.e. "a body who delivers learning programmes which culminate in specified National Qualifications Framework (NQF) standards or qualifications and manages the assessment thereof".

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

- Person-hours;
- Staff development, including administrative and support staff;
- Infrastructure; and
- Assessor/moderator guides
- Short term plans, including target numbers and groups
- Roll-out plans and planning for lobbying of funds and resources

2.1 Policies and procedures: An enabling environment

Establishing an enabling environment suggests a structure that will facilitate the development and implementation of RPL. In the words of the RPL policy (Chapter 2):
"Unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict".

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

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

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

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

institutions, professional bodies and workplaces, where possible		
Formal agreements between ETQAs, providers and workplaces are encouraged to ensure effective validation, articulation and recognition of assessment results, where possible		

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

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

2.1.1   The purpose of RPL within the sector.

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

The following descriptions for the abovementioned options may be helpful:

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

The purpose of RPL within a particular sector, would be closely linked to:

2.1.2   The target market and target area

The target market refers to those candidates that the institution and/or its ETQA, wants to attract. (In the Faculty of Education, for example, the target market may be under-qualified teachers.) The target market could be

determined in a number of ways – the Sector Skills Plan (SSP) may inform the process either in terms of a "redress"-approach or a "critical shortage of skills"-approach. The Services SETA, for example, identified a need for RPL with domestic workers against a newly developed qualification in this area.

2.1.3   Support structures

Support structures are required at different levels. At the level of the ETQA it may require support to their constituent providers wanting to implement RPL. The benefits of support at this level are twofold:
- Enhancing an understanding of the quality assurance requirements as established by the ETQA for the implementation of RPL; and
- Developing a common interpretation of the requirements for evidence for the unit standards and qualifications. The transferability of credits between constituent providers will be facilitated through such an approach.

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

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

2.1.4   Quality assurance

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

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

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

recognised by a university.

2.2 Work or other forms of practical experience; and

2.3 Life experience

3. Policy

When selecting students for admission, the University takes into account the wide variety of backgrounds and learning experiences of the applicants. Students undertaking courses at Victoria University of Technology may be eligible to have this prior learning and experience recognized.
The Faculty/School will determine where RPL is available.

4. Authority and Scope

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

4.1 This policy does not apply where formal credit transfer arrangements have been established

4.2 Eligibility for RPL Assessment does not guarantee an applicant a place in the course.

5. Procedures

5.1 The procedure for the assessment of prior learning as the basis for credit in a course offered by the University is determined by the schools/faculties.

5.2 Dissemination of information

5.2.1 Information on the University's Recognition of Prior Learning policy and procedures will be made available to students through:
- o the faculty handbooks;
- o the publication of a university brochure on RPL

5.5 Right of appeal

5.5.1 Applicants who are either denied RPL or who wish to challenge the amount of credit given from RPL may request further consideration. Such appeals must be filed within 10 working days of issue of the notification of the outcomes of the assessment.

6. Fees

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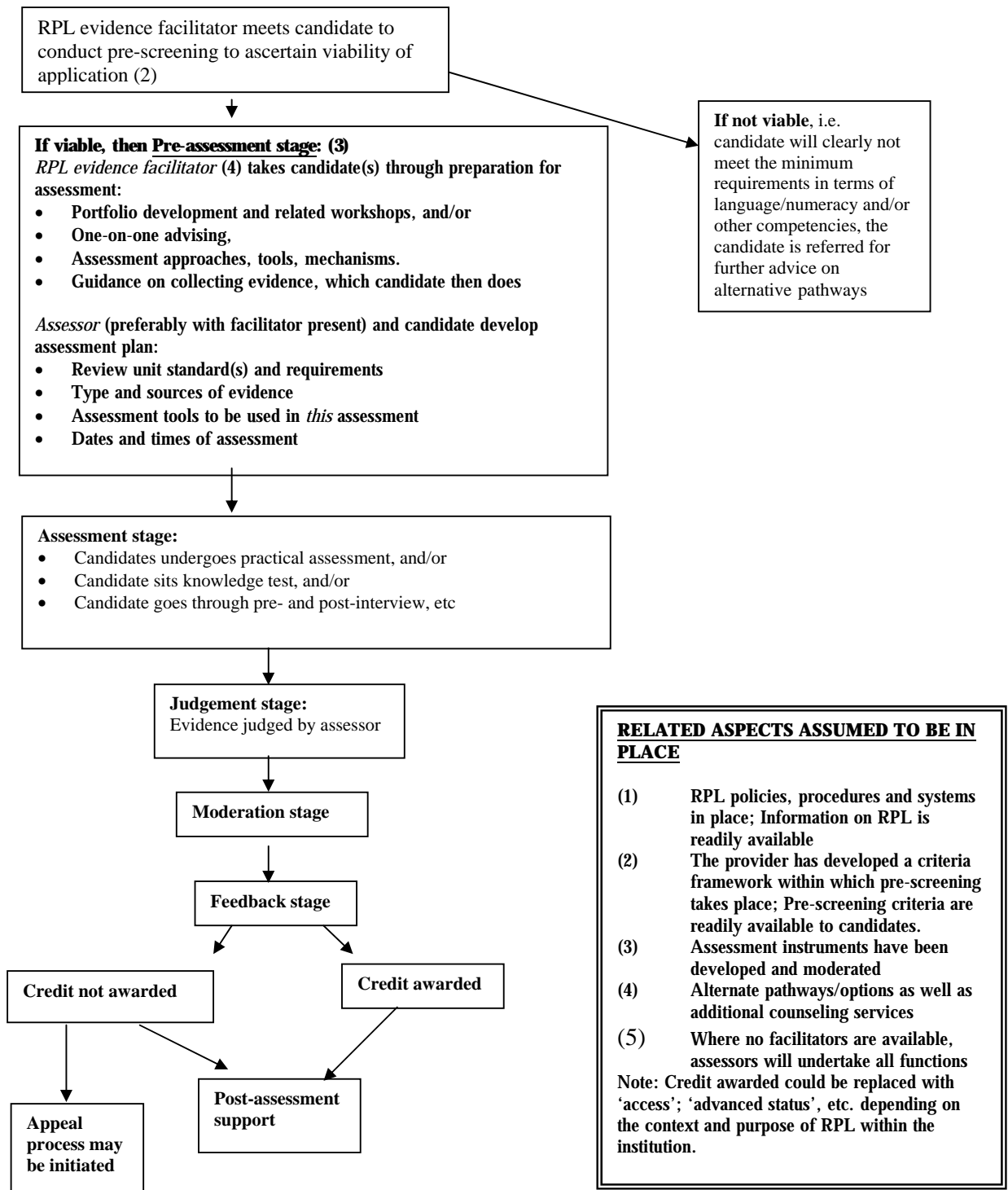
7. Monitoring

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

2.1.5   Procedures

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

A generic RPL process:

RPL evidence facilitator meets candidate to conduct pre-screening to ascertain viability of application (2)

If not viable, i.e. candidate will clearly not meet the minimum requirements in terms of language/numeracy and/or other competencies, the candidate is referred for further advice on alternative pathways

If viable, then Pre-assessment stage: (3)
RPL evidence facilitator **(4) takes candidate(s) through preparation for assessment:**
- **Portfolio development and related workshops, and/or**
- **One-on-one advising,**
- **Assessment approaches, tools, mechanisms.**
- **Guidance on collecting evidence, which candidate then does**

Assessor **(preferably with facilitator present) and candidate develop assessment plan:**
- **Review unit standard(s) and requirements**
- **Type and sources of evidence**
- **Assessment tools to be used in *this* assessment**
- **Dates and times of assessment**

Assessment stage:
- Candidates undergoes practical assessment, and/or
- Candidate sits knowledge test, and/or
- Candidate goes through pre- and post-interview, etc

Judgement stage:
Evidence judged by assessor

Moderation stage

Feedback stage

Credit not awarded

Credit awarded

Appeal process may be initiated

Post-assessment support

RELATED ASPECTS ASSUMED TO BE IN PLACE

(1) **RPL policies, procedures and systems in place; Information on RPL is readily available**
(2) **The provider has developed a criteria framework within which pre-screening takes place; Pre-screening criteria are readily available to candidates.**
(3) **Assessment instruments have been developed and moderated**
(4) **Alternate pathways/options as well as additional counseling services**
(5) **Where no facilitators are available, assessors will undertake all functions**
Note: Credit awarded could be replaced with 'access'; 'advanced status', etc. depending on the context and purpose of RPL within the institution.

2.1.6   Review and moderation

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

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

2.2   Articulation arrangements

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

2.2.1   Articulation Column

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

2.2.2   Intra-institutional articulation

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

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

- How knowledge[7] is understood
- Who defines what counts as knowledge
- How knowledge is organised
- How learning is understood
- How experience and learning from experience are understood
- How pedagogy is understood

(Harris, 2000: 95, 96)

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

Bachelor of Commerce in Management
Purpose statement:
Qualifying learners awarded with this degree, will have the requisite competence to manage a business in a particular sphere of expertise.

The key applied competence in terms of this qualification is to be able to *manage* a business in a particular sphere. Using the points mentioned above, start analysing this qualification:

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

The starting point therefore is to clearly specify what is understood, in terms of the qualification, what *management of a business* would entail, for example:
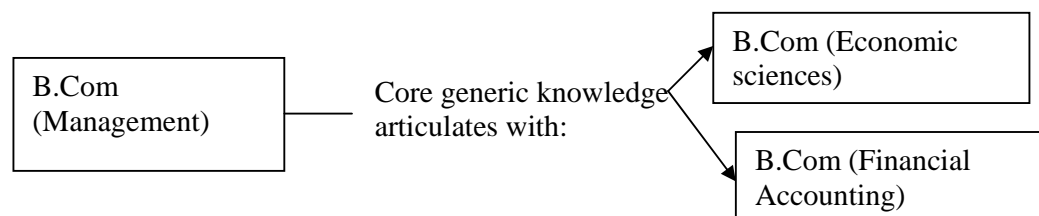
Management of a business include:
- *Consideration of market forces: feasibility studies; market research.*
- *Fiscal management: budgeting and planning.*
- *Business plan: strategic vision of now and the future, etc.*

Going through this process begins to clarify how learning attained outside formal institutions may be considered and valued in relation to formal

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

programmes. It also assists in deciding where such learning could be articulated in a qualification or a range of related qualifications, for example:

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┌─────────────────┐                                        ┌──────────────────────┐
│ B.Com           │      Core generic knowledge ╱          │ B.Com (Economic      │
│ (Management)     │──────────────────────────  ╳          │ sciences)            │
│                 │      articulates with:      ╲          └──────────────────────┘
└─────────────────┘                              ╲         ┌──────────────────────┐
                                                  ╲        │ B.Com (Financial     │
                                                           │ Accounting)          │
                                                           └──────────────────────┘
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In addition, analysing a qualification (or a range of related qualifications) in this way, assists with the development of regional or inter-institutional agreements, using the generic descriptors for levels and qualifications as a point of departure. Where all the role players in a particular field of learning agree that the specific outcomes for a qualification could be interpreted in the broad, generic manner outlined above, it will facilitate the movement of learners and credit transfer between institutions and between workplaces and institutions (Heyns, 2003).

2.2.3   Administration and the transcription of credits

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

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

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

A qualification at NQF level 4: A National Certificate: Reception, consists of 60 credits for Fundamental learning, 40 credits for Core learning and 20 credits for Elective learning. In line with the purpose of the qualification, i.e. to form the basis for further learning, clearly the assessment would be weighted to concentrate more on the Fundamental and Core learning. The structure of the qualification in terms of the purpose, the fundamentals, the

core and electives should be used as a guideline to determine the relative weighting of the parts of the qualification.

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

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

2.2.4   Flexibility of entry and exit points

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

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

2.3   Resources

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

Resources include:

2.3.1   Person-hours

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

In addition, the need for people-hours should also include the planning for time spent on support for learners wanting to access education and training, the assessment of such learners and the post-assessment support that may be required. When planning for people-hours in this regard, would-be

implementers should find ways in which a one-on-one approach is kept to the minimum, for example:

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

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

2.3.2   Staff development, including administrative and support staff

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

2.3.3   Infrastructure

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

2.3.4   Assessor/moderator guides

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

moderator guides to be used by a range of their constituent providers, including workplace-based and SMME providers (more about these in chapter 5).

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

2.3.5   Short term plans and roll-out of the initiative

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

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

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

Summary

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

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

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:

- Training of staff
- The development of assessor and moderator guidelines, including assessment processes and procedures
- Appropriate infra-structure for assessment, including reporting mechanisms
- 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. This includes the requirements in terms of registration of assessors and moderators in line with legislation and policy. This chapter also highlights the need for 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 for staff that will be dealing with the RPL process. The self-audit tool in the 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 makes 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, though, 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
- Pre-assessment

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

If 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 an evidence facilitator will be expected 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 time well spent. The facilitator, as part of the team that supports the candidate, should therefore 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, it is therefore important that he/she is competent in the function of evidence facilitation, as well as assessment and that he/she is 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;
- 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);
- Timing of assessment;
- Sequence of activities;
- Accountabilities, deadlines, appeals processes; and
- Arrangements for the reviewing 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 therefore 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 contextual expertise whereby their expertise relates to an understanding of occupational contexts within which the candidate may have gained the learning. This requires that the assessor is 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 are deemed competent in the generic assessor standard, as well as being an expert in the field of learning where 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. Further, 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 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 than is support 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 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)

However, 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 Learner's 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 arose as a result of poor quality unit standards and qualifications, clearly this information must be made available to the responsible ETQA. However, 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 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 when 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
- Portfolio's
- Demonstrations
- 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 Quality Assurance Body's (CETA's), assessor guide:

The **ASSESSOR GUIDE** is one of the instruments the Assessor uses in the assessment & 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 whereby it is determined 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. **NSB's** 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 of 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 is required;
- To provide an appeals procedure for dissatisfied learners;
- To evaluate the performance of assessors;
- To provide procedures for the de-registration of unsatisfactory assessors; and
- To provide feedback to NSB's on unit standards and qualifications (via the ETQA).

<div align="right">(SAQA, 2001: 60)</div>

The internal moderator(s) of a provider therefore has a very important role to play in establishing and maintaining an RPL system for the provider/institution and 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. However, extracts from the table, (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 highlight some of the processes:

	What?	**Who is responsible?**	**Moderation?**
Stage 1: **Design**	Policy and procedures Assessment methodologies: • Instruments • Exemplars • Assessor guides • Evidence guides Quality assurance interventions Support structures	All Assessors Moderators All	 Pre-assessment moderation of tools Overall process Support for candidates and staff
Stage 2: **Implement**	Assessment procedures Assessment	Administrative staff, evidence facilitators and assessors Assessors	Procedures in accordance with provider plans Assessment results and assessor conduct
Stage 3: **Review**	Policy and procedures Assessment methodologies: • Instruments • Exemplars • Assessor guides • Evidence guides Quality assurance interventions	All Assessors and moderators All	Assessment processes and procedures Assessment methodologies and instruments Moderation processes
Stage 4: **Report**	Assessment results Assessment instruments Practitioner capacity Feedback to NSBs regarding unit standards and qualifications	Assessors and moderators Assessors and moderators Moderators in accordance with provider specifications Moderators	Results and achievements Appropriateness of instruments Skills of practitioners Appropriateness of unit standards and qualifications

3.3 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 who will at various stages, make contact with the RPL candidate. A focus on these roles and functions of these practitioners may create the impression that RPL is highly resource 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". There is no doubt, however, 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 re-structuring 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. Therefore, 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 is time and resources well spent.

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