

CHAPTER 4: THE TOOLS: DESIGN AND MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT

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

Purpose of this chapter

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

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

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

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

- Assessment tools and instruments;
- Assessor guides; and
- Reporting structures.

4.1 Methods and Processes of Assessment

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

METHODS AND PROCESSES OF ASSESSMENT		
<i>Assessment is a structured process for gathering evidence and making judgements about a candidate's performance in relation to registered national standards and qualifications. This process involves the candidate and the assessor within a particular context in a transparent and collaborative manner.</i>		
	Y	N
The purpose of assessment and the expectations of the candidate are clarified		
Assessment plans take into account the form, quality and sources of evidence required (for example performance evidence, knowledge evidence, knowledge testimony, etc.)		
The form and quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment are established		
The candidate is actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment is fair and transparent. Possible barriers to fair assessment are identified and addressed.		
Assessment plans indicate a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments to validate diverse types of learning		
The choice of assessment methods is fit for purpose and ensures reliable and valid assessment outcomes.		
An appeals process is in place and made known to the candidate.		
Assessment instruments and exemplars are developed and moderated in compliance with the ETQA requirements.		
Assessment reports indicate the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome and recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or re-assessment.		
Moderation and review mechanisms are in place, including policies for verification, evaluation and quality assurance of assessments and assessment systems.		

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

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. This should be captured in the RPL policy of the institution/provider. This

purpose (or combination of purposes) must however 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 – credits are awarded for learning, not for time spent in a particular environment. In addition, credits are always awarded through some or other form of assessment and are not awarded 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, know 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 do 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
- If self-employed in the past, evidence of running a business using the skills and knowledge being claimed.

(Mays, T. 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 literature review	To illustrate the range of reading done by the applicant and ensure appropriate 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, R. in Harris, J., 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 National Qualifications Framework. 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 it may be less threatening to the candidate. The candidate also 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 rather than using a formal written examination, an oral examination could be used).

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, mirrors this approach (p. 33). All assessments should therefore encapsulate the following basic processes:

- 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.

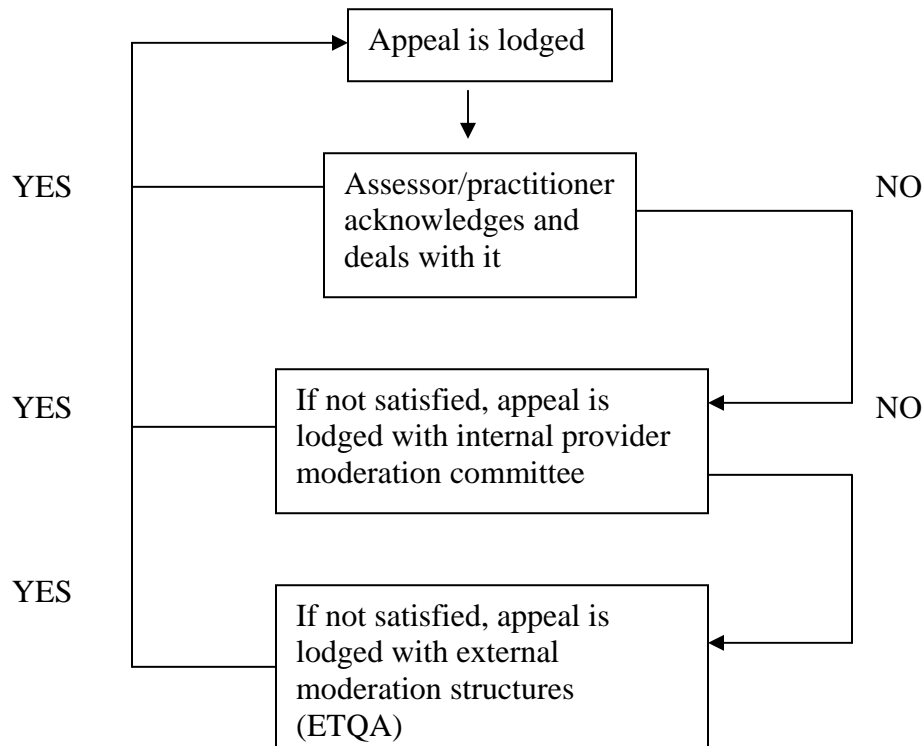
- The Assessment phase

The assessment phase again are 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 agreements 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:



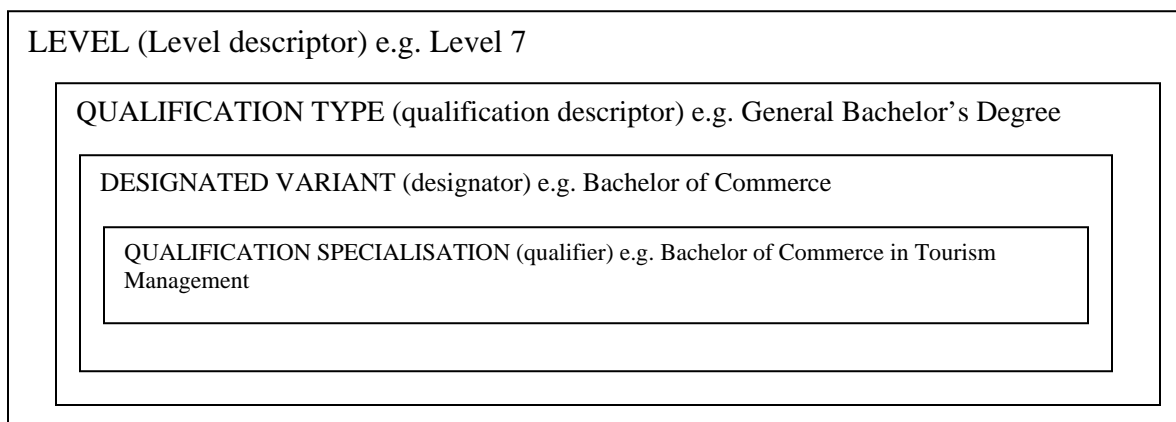
4.2 A Working Example

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 recognition of prior learning, 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 and 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 though, 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. 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, 2003:). 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 ⁸(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:



⁸ 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 7

The description of what a learner should be able to do at Level 7 of the NQF, i.e. at the achievement of a first degree is as follows:

Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
<i>Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. a well-rounded and systematic knowledge base in one or more disciplines/fields and a detailed knowledge of some specialist areas;b. 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;c. 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;d. an ability to deal with unfamiliar concrete and abstract problems and issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments;e. well-developed information retrieval skills; critical analysis and synthesis of quantitative and/or qualitative data; presentation skills following prescribed formats, using IT skills effectively;f. an ability to present and communicate information and opinions in well-structured arguments, showing an awareness of audience and using academic/professional discourse appropriately.	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.

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
- 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 NAP discussion document (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 7 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 7 of the NQF, the above qualification description indicates what should be assessed, in particular:

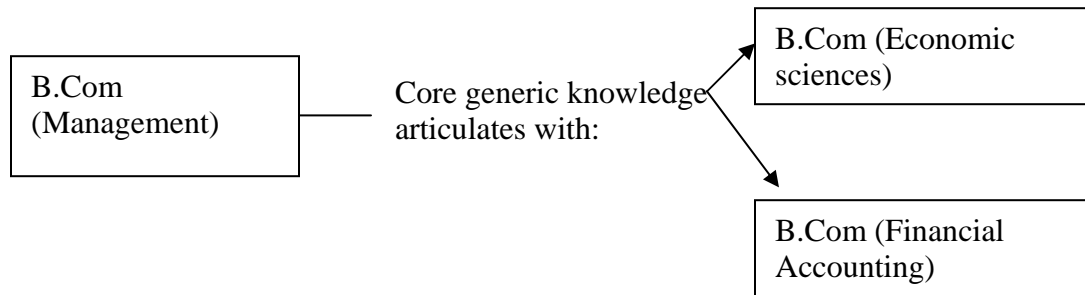
- The extent to which a candidate is conversant in an area of specialisation, e.g. Management in the Tourism industry.

It 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) highlight 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 are emerging:

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.*

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*
- *The implementation of a marketing strategy, etc.*

Once practitioners are clear on what would constitute, within the framework of the qualification, applied knowledge, 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	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

	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.		procedures, operations and techniques; The ability to apply knowledge in unfamiliar contexts.
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	Exposure to other related disciplines	IT and information retrieval skills

	practical experience in a workplace; Testimonials and references in terms of work responsibilities.		
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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 recognition of prior learning. However, putting together of 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 rather attempts 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, 2003).

In addition, 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?

Using this approach 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		
<i>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</i>		
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	Y	N
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. Examination papers, the marking thereof and the results, were always 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 thereof 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 therefore 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* document – 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”.

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

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 precedes 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 ETD practitioner derives information about his/her teaching; and
- The education and training system is informed about the strengths and weaknesses in the system

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

However, 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 can not 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.

It 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 whereby we can develop improved ways of teaching and learning.

Chapter 5 will deal with quality management for RPL.

CHAPTER 5: REVIEW AND EVALUATION: QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Introduction

Chapter 5 of the guideline document will particularly address the key criteria for quality assurance, which are to be built into the system. These key criteria are reflected in a number of other SAQA policy and guideline documents, and as such is in line with the principle of quality management as a critical mechanism to ensure quality improvement.

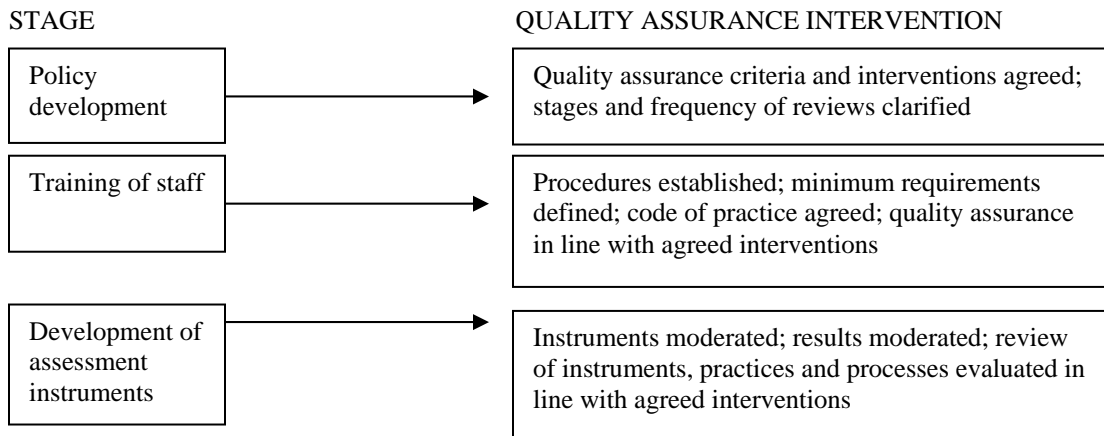
In all the official SAQA documents the point is made that quality management should not be seen as an add-on, to be conceptualized at the end of a process. Therefore, throughout this guideline document, reference is made to the need for review and quality assurance processes, including the moderation of the overall RPL process. In addition, this guideline also points out that not only assessments are moderated and reviewed, but also the tools and instruments and the staff who perform RPL functions. This is to ensure that quality management is built-in from the outset and that the criteria against which the initiative will be evaluated, are identified and incorporated from the outset.

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter intends to highlight the importance of quality assurance mechanisms and processes needed for the successful implementation of a credible and accountable RPL system. Such quality assurance processes are critical for the protection of the integrity of education and training and is a key principle of the National Qualifications Framework in terms of the quality improvement imperative.

5.1 Quality management of RPL processes

Quality assurance, moderation and review are embedded in each of the aspects discussed in this guideline document: in chapter 2, the need for pre-agreed quality assurance mechanisms as part of the organisational policy and procedures were highlighted. These are reflected in the moderation system, which is described in the policy. In chapter 3, the need for quality assurance of the assessment methods and the practices of evidence facilitators, assessors and moderators, as well as the assessment process, are described. In chapter 4, an accountable process whereby decisions are reached with regard to what should be assessed, and how such assessments should take place, were discussed. Moderation of assessments and assessment results has also been highlighted throughout the document. It should therefore be clear that quality management is not a ‘once-off’ occurrence, but is intended to promote quality at each stage of the process. This could be reflected as follows:



Internationally, a very high premium is placed on the quality of the RPL process. As Simosko (1996: 179) states:

“In many contexts, flexible [RPL] assessment services will be a new idea. It will therefore be important for the providing centre to demonstrate on an on-going basis that it is not offering a ‘cheap’ or ‘easy’ route to credit or qualifications”

An accountable system will therefore ensure that the integrity and quality of assessments are protected. This is by no means true for RPL only - increasingly providers/institutions of education and training will be monitored and audited with regard to their assessment policies, procedures and practices. In Britain, as in South Africa, all assessments and assessment processes are under scrutiny: Simosko (1996: 97) adds that “To no small degree, the credibility of the outcome [of RPL assessments] depends almost exclusively on the validity, reliability and fairness of the assessment process”. These principles have been adopted in South Africa and in future, all assessments must adhere to the following principles of good assessment (SAQA, 2001: 15 – 19):

“Fairness

An assessment should not in any way hinder or advantage a learner.

Unfairness in assessment would constitute:

- Inequality of opportunities, resources and appropriate teaching and learning approaches in terms of acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills
- Bias in respect of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, social class and race in so far as that the assessment approaches, methods, instruments and materials do not take into account these differences
- Lack of clarity in terms of what is being assessed
- Comparison of learners’ work with other learners, particularly in terms of diversity of learning styles, home language, values, gender, race, life experiences, etc.

Validity

Validity in assessment refers to measuring what it says it is measuring, be it knowledge, understanding, subject content, skill, information, behaviours, etc.

Validity in assessment would constitute:

- Assessment procedures, methods, instruments and materials have to match what is being assessed.

In order to achieve validity in the assessment, assessors should:

- State clearly what outcome(s) is/are being assessed
- Use an appropriate type or sources of evidence
- Use an appropriate method of assessment
- Select an appropriate instrument of assessment

Reliability

Reliability in assessment is about consistency. Consistency refers to the same judgements being made in the same, or similar contexts each time a particular assessment for specified stated intentions is administered.

Assessment results should not be perceived to have been influenced by variables such as:

- Assessor bias in terms of the learners' gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion, like/dislike, appearance and such like
- Different assessors interpreting unit standards or qualifications inconsistently
- Different assessors applying different standards
- Assessor stress and fatigue
- Insufficient evidence gathered
- Assessor assumptions about the learner, based on previous (good or bad) performance

Practicability

Practicability refers to ensuring that assessments take into account the available financial resources, facilities, equipment and time. Assessment that require elaborate arrangements for equipment and facilities, as well as being costly, will make the assessment system fail”.

5.2 International standards

In countries where RPL has been implemented on a large scale, sets of quality standards have been developed to ensure the integrity of their RPL systems. There seems to be agreement on a number of principles. These range from academic principles, to administrative procedures and fees. The standards established in each of these contexts are intended to assist and direct quality assurance of RPL.

Consider the USA standards:

1. "Credit should be awarded only for learning, and not for experience.
2. College credit should be awarded only for college-level learning.
3. Credit should be awarded only for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.
4. The determination of competence levels and of credit awards must be made by appropriate subject matter and academic experts.
5. Credit should be appropriate to the academic context in which it is accepted.
6. Credit awards and their transcript entries should be monitored to avoid giving credit twice for the same learning.
7. Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available.
8. Fees charged for assessment should be based on the services performed in the process and not determined by the amount of credit awarded.
9. All personnel involved in the assessment of learning should receive adequate training for the functions they perform, and there should be provision for their continued professional development.
10. Assessment programs should be regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated, and revised as needed to reflect changes in the needs being served and in the state of the assessment arts."

(Whitaker, 1989, p. 9 and 10)

Many providers/institutions in South Africa have adopted these standards for the implementation of RPL at their organisations.

In Britain, in addition to the standards mentioned above, 'malpractices' in terms of RPL have been identified:

"Ten APL [RPL] Malpractices to be avoided:

- ❑ Granting credits for 'time served' or just for experience.
- ❑ Basing assessment fees (Portfolio etc) on the number of credits awarded.
- ❑ Failure to focus on specific credits and programmes.
- ❑ Failing to separate the role of the APL advisor from that of the assessor.
- ❑ Promising an APL service without the regard for resources, staff development and expertise in the area.
- ❑ Having no method of checking inconsistencies and APL malpractice: offering uncoordinated and inauthentic service.
- ❑ Failing to publicly declare in advance the rules, regulations and criteria used for APL assessment.
- ❑ Failing to provide a justified transcription of APL outcomes, including sufficiency of evidence as part of quality assurance.
- ❑ Failing to give feedback to intending students.
- ❑ Promising credits and/or admission to programmes before assessment takes place. (not checking authenticity of claim)." (Nyatanga, et al, 1998, p. 9)

These malpractices have been teased out and made relevant to providers/institutions at an organisational level:

“Micro (Academic) quality:

- ❑ Ensure programmes or modules have clear learning outcomes or competencies both staff and students can base their APL assessments on.
- ❑ Ensure programme leaders and admission tutors are conversant with APL principles and their application to assessment.
- ❑ Within the institution each school or faculty should have an APL co-ordinator to enhance subject-specific debate and feedback.
- ❑ Subject teams should have a nucleus of people capable of either advising on or assessing APL claims.
- ❑ Give appropriate support and feedback to students.
- ❑ Identify strengths and weaknesses of the APL provision through (a) self-evaluation (critical peer review); (b) institutional audit of artefacts (c) students’ feedback; (d) external views and external examiner feedback. External views may include professional bodies, industry and commerce and funding bodies.
- ❑ Disseminate good practice in the accreditation of prior learning” (Nyatanga et al, 1998, p. 41)

In Canada, possible barriers to the implementation of RPL have been identified and the actions taken are described as follows:

“Concerns about quality in PLAR [RPL] have been addressed in several ways in Canada:

- ❑ Standards for assessment, policies and procedures have been developed at most practising institutions.
- ❑ Educators and trainers have begun to prepare course descriptions using learning outcomes, which are clear statements about what an individual needs to know and be able to do to be successful in a course.
- ❑ Institutional faculty and staff have been trained in PLAR so that adequate support services are provided.
- ❑ Institutions have enabled faculty assessors to use a range of appropriate methods and tools in their work.
- ❑ PLAR candidates are provided with orientation to enable them to make informed decisions about undertaking an assessment.
- ❑ Community outreach activities are undertaken to disseminate accurate information on PLAR and promote services to non-traditional markets.
- ❑ National organisations have funded the development of standards for PLAR practices, quality audits and conferences promoting best practices.”

(Van Kleef, 1998, p.7)

5.3 Core criteria for quality management systems

The SAQA RPL policy offers an example of a self-audit tool in relation to Quality Management Systems (SAQA, 2002: 27):

Quality Management Systems		
<i>Quality Management Systems are in place to ensure the continuous improvement of assessment systems. The Quality Management System ensures the critical integrity of assessments and reporting and recording processes inform strategic planning requirements at provider, sectoral and national level.</i>		
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Quality Management Systems for assessment are designed, documented and implemented in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications		
Quality Management Systems ensure the refining of assessment policies, procedures and services at all levels and inform planning for further development aimed at meeting agreed targets		
Quality Management Systems provide for input from all key stakeholders, including representatives from the candidate community		
Quality Management Systems provide for support in meeting developmental targets, including evaluation and monitoring activities		
Evaluation and monitoring activities are clearly spelt out in the QMS documentation, including diagnostic, formative and summative activities		
Evaluation and monitoring activities ensure consistency within a sector		
Assessment documentation, reports and sources of evidence are maintained in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications		
RPL results are recorded in accordance with the requirements of the ETQA and SAQA's NLRD		
Information on RPL outcomes, including unsuccessful and successful applications are maintained		
The Quality Management System provides for systems to monitor the progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL		
The Quality Management System provides for analyses and reporting of services and results		

The main objectives for the establishment of quality assurance processes are to promote quality throughout the RPL process and to support the developmental targets of a provider/institution's RPL plans. Quality assurance should not be seen as an 'inspection', rather as an 'intervention' to ensure continual improvement and development. In the SAQA RPL policy (2002: 13) it is noted that:

“A developmental and incremental approach gives providers of education and training the space to explore and experiment with implementation of the [RPL] policy. This supports the need for institutions and sectors to retain their autonomy and to develop implementation plans within the constraints of their organisations while meeting the agreed requirements of the framework and criteria indicated in the policy”.

Summary

A key function of a quality management system is to be able to provide information that will inform decisions and actions in the future. The key challenge for the implementation of RPL in South Africa, is the sustainability of such a system and the information made available through quality management is critical for continuous quality improvement. In addition, the development and implementation of quality management processes is in keeping with the world-wide trend of a more accountable education and training system.

Quality management therefore, is a process whereby an institution/provider/organization constantly checks whether they are meeting their pre-agreed criteria, with the purpose to identify possible problems and improve with each cycle of review.

CONCLUSION

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is being introduced in South Africa in a time of intense change. Education and training are being restructured in fundamental ways, both in terms of a more equitable infrastructural spread of resources, but also in the very structure and purpose of qualifications, the curricula, learning programmes and approaches to assessment.

It is therefore not surprising that providers of education and training see RPL as yet another manifestation of the system being under threat through everything new that is being introduced. In a time when education and training in this country is under intense scrutiny and the validity and integrity of previous educational approaches and views are being questioned, RPL could easily become a victim (and not an agent) of transformation, i.e. RPL could become the 'politically correct' thing to do, which, as soon as the 'socio-political' imperatives are seen to have been met, is no longer practiced.

It is therefore critical that RPL is seen to be a process which not only values different forms of learning and gives formal recognition regardless of how the learning was achieved, but also passes the test of intellectual scrutiny in terms of the integrity and the validity of the process and becomes integral to education and training practice, particularly in the ways we assess (Heyns, 2003: 2).

For this reason, it is also important that research is undertaken as a means to encourage intellectual scrutiny and to evaluate our progress against targets for the implementation of RPL. The following is a list of possible topics, which in the short and long term will help to develop a better understanding of RPL implementation within the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework:

- What are the best assessment methodologies and processes within particular contexts?
- Developing appropriate assessment tools and instruments for RPL assessment
- How can non-traditional knowledge systems, such as indigenous knowledge, be incorporated into in curricula and assessment?
- Regional collaboration models for providers offering RPL services
- Equitable and sustainable funding for RPL
- How well is RPL being implemented?
- What are the issues with regard to RPL implementation in specific learning areas, disciplines or professions?
- What kind of curriculum innovation is possible as a consequence of implementing RPL?
- What is the size and nature of the pool of RPL candidates?
- Centralised and decentralized approaches to RPL
- National and regional approaches to RPL.
- The contribution of RPL to lifelong learning

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