



# RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) HANDBOOK FOR RPL PRACTITIONERS



Support implementation of the African  
Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF-II)

[www.acqf.africa](http://www.acqf.africa)

This **Handbook on Recognition of Prior Learning for Practitioners** is elaborated in the context of the Implementation Plan of the project “Supporting Implementation of the African Continental Qualifications Framework” (ACQF-II).

Views and opinions expressed in the document are the responsibility of the authors and should in no way be attributed to the institutions to which they are affiliated, or to the African Union Commission and the project implementation institution – the European Training Foundation.

We acknowledge all contributions from institutions and experts who expressed views, comments and recommendations during the consultation process, and supported the authors’ team in the accomplishment of this mission.

Comments and additional information can be sent to Eduarda Castel-Branco ([ecb@etf.europa.eu](mailto:ecb@etf.europa.eu)).

**Lead author of this Handbook: Patrick Werquin**

**Contributions to chapters and sections of the Handbook:** Eduarda Castel-Branco (ETF), Stanley Maindi

**Reviewers:** Eduarda Castel-Branco, Stanley Maindi, Olavo Correia, James Mwewa

**Technical support:** Zalan Jakab (PPMI)

06 August 2024

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	3
Abbreviations .....	6
1. Introduction and Context .....	7
1.1. Context – RPL at the Core of the ACQF II.....	7
1.2. A Handbook for a Wide Audience – Toward a Broad Definition of the Notion of Practitioners .....	7
1.3. The Guidelines in a Nutshell/ The Scope and Structure of the Handbook .....	8
1.4. How to Use this Handbook for Immediate Access to Key Information .....	9
2. What is RPL in Lifelong Learning.....	11
2.1. Quick Reminders.....	11
2.1.1. Conceptual Clarification.....	11
2.1.2. What is RPL? – Definitions .....	14
2.1.3. The Supply – i.e., the RPL System set in Motion by a Country .....	17
2.1.4. The Demand – i.e., the Applicant’s RPL Pathway .....	18
2.1.5. What RPL is and is not – FAQ.....	19
2.1.6. RPL – A Policy Tool .....	20
2.1.7. RPL and the Double Currency Paradigm .....	23
2.1.8. RPL as a Powerful Mechanism for Promoting Lifelong Learning .....	23
2.1.9. RPL as a Powerful Mechanism for Innovation .....	23
2.1.10. RPL in Higher Education.....	24
2.1.11. RPL for Qualifications Leading to a Regulated Occupations .....	28
2.2. Quality Assurance in Recognition of Prior Learning .....	30
2.2.1. RPL – A Specific Area for Quality Assurance .....	30
2.2.2. Important Special Cases and Solutions.....	32
2.2.3. RPL – The Encounter of a System and an Individual.....	33
2.2.4. ... with an Intermediate Level: The Network of RPL Centres.....	33
2.2.5. Risk Associated with Quality Assurance in the Context of RPL.....	33
2.2.6. Quality Assurance is not only about Monitoring and Evaluation .....	34
2.2.7. Quality Assurance is not only about Developing Guidelines .....	35
2.2.8. General Aim and Specific Objectives of Quality Assurance in RPL .....	35
2.2.9. Licensing or Accreditation.....	38
2.2.10. Recommendations – Licensing and then Accreditation .....	41
2.2.11. Further recommendations.....	41
3. Education and Learning Theories Behind RPL .....	42
3.1. Theoretical Foundations and Links to RPL.....	43
3.1.1. Lifelong Learning .....	43
3.1.2. Constructivist Theory .....	44

3.1.3.	Experiential Learning Theory .....	45
3.1.4.	Situated Learning Theory .....	46
3.1.5.	Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy) .....	48
3.1.6.	Transformative Learning Theory .....	49
3.1.7.	Equity and Social Justice .....	49
3.1.8.	Human Capital Theory .....	50
3.2.	Practical Implications and Applications for RPL of its Theoretical Underpinnings .....	51
3.2.1.	RPL Promotes Lifelong Learning .....	51
3.2.2.	Constructivist Theory .....	51
3.2.3.	Experiential Learning Theory .....	52
3.2.4.	Situated Learning Theory .....	52
3.2.5.	Adult Learning Theory .....	52
3.2.6.	Transformative Learning Theory .....	52
3.2.7.	Equity and Social Justice .....	52
3.2.8.	Human Capital Theory .....	53
3.3.	Conclusion .....	53
4.	How to Do RPL .....	54
4.1.	Rules for RPL practitioners .....	55
4.1.1.	Guidance Should be Provided to Individuals and Potential RPL Applicants .....	55
4.1.2.	RPL Should Be Individual/applicant-centred .....	55
4.1.3.	RPL Assessment Should Be fair .....	55
4.1.4.	Respect the Privacy of the Individual/applicant .....	56
4.1.5.	Take Into Account Equality, Inclusiveness and Diversity Issues .....	56
4.1.6.	RPL Should Be Accessible .....	56
4.1.7.	RPL Should Be flexible .....	56
4.1.8.	Assess Learning Outcomes and Not Just the Duration of the Experience .....	57
4.1.9.	Propose a Transparent Valid Reliable Fair and Authentic Assessment .....	57
4.1.10.	Recognise Learning Outcomes Acquired in Non-formal and Informal Contexts are of Equal Value to Learning Outcomes Acquired in Formal Contexts .....	57
4.1.11.	Always Explain the Decisions of the RPL Assessors .....	58
4.1.12.	Involve a Formal Assessment of Complaints .....	58
4.1.13.	Propose Alternatives to Failed Applicants .....	58
4.1.14.	There is Internal and External Monitoring and Evaluation .....	59
4.1.15.	RPL Should Be in Line with Any Statutory Legislation .....	59
4.1.16.	RPL Process should be Quality Assured .....	59
4.1.17.	Post-RPL support .....	59
4.2.	Ensure that the Guidelines are Applied .....	60
4.3.	Examples of Good Practice in the Field of Quality Assurance .....	60
4.4.	Individual Assessment Pathway – The Core of the Work of RPL Practitioners .....	61

4.5.	RPL institutional and Governance structures .....	61
4.6.	RPL Step-by-step – Rationale, Stakeholders, Explanation and Examples .....	62
4.6.1.	Initial Information and Guidance .....	62
4.6.2.	Administrative Registration .....	71
4.6.3.	Application Screening and Eligibility .....	75
4.6.4.	Preparation of the Final Assessment .....	80
4.6.5.	Final Assessment of Learning Outcomes .....	85
4.6.6.	Certification (of Learning Outcomes) .....	90
4.7.	Quality Assurance for Pilots – A Checklist .....	93
5.	Case studies from African countries .....	95
5.1.	Cabo Verde .....	95
5.1.1.	Link of RVCC with the NQF of Cabo Verde .....	95
5.1.2.	Organisation and implementation of RVCC .....	95
5.1.3.	Higher education .....	99
5.1.4.	Legal, political, and technical basis of RVCC in Cabo Verde .....	99
5.2.	RPL in the context of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States .....	100
5.2.1.	In the context of SADC .....	100
5.2.2.	At regional level .....	100
5.2.3.	At national level .....	101
5.2.4.	Country cases in the SADC context .....	101
6.	Conclusions .....	115
7.	References .....	117
	Annexes .....	120
	Glossary of Key Terms .....	120

## Abbreviations

<b>ACQF</b>	African Continental Qualifications Framework
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CAT</b>	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
<b>CATS</b>	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
<b>CBT</b>	Competence-based Training
<b>CNQ</b>	National Qualifications Catalogue
<b>DUC</b>	Differentiated Unit Cost of assessing Prior learning
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>HE</b>	Higher education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>KNQA</b>	Kenya National Qualifications Authority
<b>LLL</b>	Lifelong learning
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MoL</b>	Ministry of Labour
<b>MQA</b>	Mauritius Qualifications Authority
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NQS</b>	National Qualifications System
<b>QA</b>	Quality assurance
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>RVCC</b>	Recognition Validation Certification of Competences
<b>UC-SNQ</b>	Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System
<b>SAQA</b>	South African Qualifications Authority
<b>SQA</b>	Seychelles Qualifications Authority
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and vocational education and training
<b>VET</b>	Vocational Education and Training
<b>VNFIL</b>	Validation of non-formal and informal learning
<b>WBL</b>	Work-based learning
<b>ZAQA</b>	Zambia Qualifications Authority

## 1. Introduction and Context

This Handbook for Practitioners of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) builds on international and African experiences, knowledge and practices. It combines a readable and pertinent conceptual and theoretical background, with practical guidance on processes, steps, and technical components of RPL<sup>1</sup> implementation. Moreover, the Handbook presents concrete examples of RPL practice in seven African countries, which are useful for any institution and country on the continent interested in benchmarking and developing the national RPL framework.

RPL does not work in isolation. It is part of the wider eco-system of lifelong learning, and as such interacts closely with the National Qualifications Framework, and with Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. Moreover, RPL relates to new concepts and practices such as micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability.

### 1.1. Context – RPL at the Core of the ACQF II

The Output 3.3 of the project “Supporting Implementation of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF-II) is centred on an RPL Campaign, and this Handbook is one of its contributing elements. This Handbook guides RPL practitioners so that the journey of RPL applicants throughout the RPL process is the smoothest possible, leading to positive outcomes for applicants of RPL, and allowing them to benefit from their newly acquired qualification (or set of credits or else<sup>2</sup>).

RPL is clearly addressed in the ACQF Policy Document, with the scope of the ACQF being a “comprehensive, inclusive meta-framework, supporting holistic and systemic vision of learning, qualifications, and credentials” and “oriented to lifelong learning and supports parity of esteem of learning outcomes acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts, and all levels of education and training.” It is in fact one of the main areas of activity to be carried out in the context of the ACQF II that is meant to “support recognition of prior learning by means of development of common guidelines and approaches, updated inventory of recognition of prior learning systems on the continent, a wide information campaign and support to countries, and support to digitalisation of credentials.” This needs a well-trained labour force of RPL practitioners.

This Handbook provides the guidelines and technical components for developing the capacities of the RPL practitioners. The ACQF supports quality and accessible RPL, as a key component of lifelong learning policies and a mechanism for equity and social inclusion. These guidelines are meant to ensure these objectives are achieved.

In the ACQF context, RPL is seen as a possible option for achieving a qualification at all levels of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of any country, i.e., from the purely vocational levels (in secondary education or at the very beginning of tertiary education) to the higher levels, corresponding to qualifications awarded in higher education institutions (HEIs).

### 1.2. A Handbook for a Wide Audience – Toward a Broad Definition of the Notion of Practitioners

This Handbook resolutely takes the side of proposing a tool that would be of help to most professionals dealing with RPL one way or another. Therefore, the definition of “practitioner” is voluntarily not too narrow. It includes all professionals whose occupation or activities have to do with recognition of prior learning (RPL).

It therefore includes all professionals that are specialised in the field of acquiring learning outcomes in contexts that are not necessarily formal, and of validating and recognising them. They can be career

---

<sup>1</sup> Recognition of Prior Learning

<sup>2</sup> For the sake of simplicity of the presentation, it will be assumed that the main potential outcome of an RPL process is the awarding of a qualification. Nevertheless, the remainder of this Handbook will show how and why it should not necessarily be the case.

guidance officers, educators, trainers, psychologists (of education or labour), human resources professionals, managers of in-company education and training and, of course, RPL providers, RPL guidance officers, verifiers, or assessors.

These professionals may practice in the following institutions or work places providing RPL services: ministries, regulatory bodies, qualification awarding institutions, RPL assessment centres, workplaces, industry, workers' organisations, professional bodies, development partners, among others.

The role of these Practitioners entails creation of awareness and publicity about RPL, counselling and facilitation to potential RPL Applicants, development of the portfolio of evidence, development of assessment tools, assessment of RPL applicants, verification of the assessment process, awarding of a qualification to successful RPL applicants, processing appeal cases, registering the RPL achievements into the National Database of Qualifications and post-RPL-assessment follow up.

In some cases, RPL Practitioners, in collaboration with relevant industry or professional bodies, may also be involved in the development of Occupational Standards that may not be in existence or are not in sync with RPL context, hence require customisation for adoption.

This Handbook assumes that all these RPL professionals need a sound understanding of what RPL is about and how to best create publicity and awareness, counsel and facilitate, assess, validate and recognise the acquired learning outcomes from formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

This Handbook sets broad minimum requirements for one to qualify as an RPL Practitioner. These include having a comprehensive and current knowledge of the industry practices and the job being assessed, completed RPL Practitioners pedagogy training, at least three years of industry experience in the trade area/occupation, understanding of the qualifications frameworks and being accredited/licensed by relevant authority as an RPL Practitioner.

### 1.3. The Guidelines in a Nutshell/ The Scope and Structure of the Handbook

As it is clear by now, this document is designed as a handbook for all RPL practitioners. Therefore, this Handbook is wide in essence. It contains different components for all practitioners to find what they need when they need it. It is structured along the following lines:



The quick reminders about what RPL aim at setting the RPL scene so that the recommendations to RPL practitioners later in this Handbook appear more sensible in relation to what RPL is about and meant for.

The section on quality assurance is deemed essential here because RPL practitioners are the guardians of the quality of the entire process, from initial information to the validation and certification of learning outcomes and to the awarding of a qualification. This requests that RPL practitioners are

The description of the RPL process step by step for RPL applicants is the thread for RPL practitioners to organise their work on a daily basis. It corresponds to the moment when RPL practitioners are actually in contact with RPL applicants. It is where this Handbook goes into details in



fully aware of the issues regarding quality. This is the sine qua non condition for protecting RPL against its detractors, and to guarantee its sustainability over time. order to provide RPL practitioners with clear guidelines regarding RPL in practice, and regarding the RPL assessment in particular.

#### 1.4. How to Use this Handbook for Immediate Access to Key Information

This Handbook is designed for RPL practitioners to use as a comprehensive guide. It provides sound knowledge about the theoretical underpinnings behind RPL as well as practical checklists and suggestions for implementing RPL. It can be read cover-to-cover for a complete understanding or accessed directly by sections for specific information, for particular need. Each main section (2 to 4) is structured to provide a clear understanding of its objectives, key takeaways and additional resources if necessary. Redundancies are included to ensure that practitioners can find relevant information without having to read the entire Handbook sequentially.

In addition to the summary, introduction, conclusion, list of references and annexes, this Handbook proposes three major sections, with subsections, for quick access to key information by the reader as indicated in Table 0.

**Table 0. Content of Key Sections**

Sections	Content
<b>2.1 Quick Reminders</b>	This section sets the stage with foundational concepts and definitions related to RPL. It explains key terms and concepts, provides definitions and examples, describes the setup required for RPL, details the stages an individual goes through in the RPL process, clarifies common misconceptions, discusses RPL as a strategic tool for policy, and explains the dual benefits of RPL.
<b>2.2 Quality Assurance in Recognition of Prior Learning</b>	This section emphasises the importance of quality assurance in the RPL process. It focuses on quality assurance in the context of RPL, addresses unique scenarios and their solutions, describes the interaction between the RPL system and individual applicants, discusses the role of RPL centres, explores challenges in ensuring quality assurance, clarifies the broader scope of quality assurance beyond just monitoring, outlines the objectives of quality assurance, discusses the importance of accreditation for RPL centres, provides recommendations for effective licensing and accreditation, and offers additional advice for maintaining quality assurance.
<b>3.1 Theoretical Foundations and Links to RPL</b>	This section explains the educational theories that underpin RPL practices. It discusses the principles of lifelong learning, constructivist learning theory, experiential learning model, situated learning, adult learning principles, transformative learning, equity and social justice in learning, and human capital theory and its relevance to RPL.
<b>3.2 Practical Implications and Applications for RPL of its Theoretical Underpinnings</b>	This section links theory to practice in the context of RPL. It highlights practical implications of lifelong learning theory and discusses practical applications of constructivist theory, experiential learning theory, situated learning theory, adult learning theory, transformative learning theory, equity and social justice and human capital theory to RPL.

**4.1 Rules for RPL Practitioners/  
Duties &  
responsibilities of  
RPL Practitioner**

This section lists principles and guidelines for RPL practitioners. It stresses the importance of initial guidance, emphasises a personalised approach to RPL, discusses fairness in assessment, highlights the importance of privacy, promotes inclusivity in RPL, ensures RPL processes are accessible and adaptable, focuses on outcome-based assessment, ensures assessments meet high standards, values learning from various contexts, ensures transparency in decision-making, provides mechanisms for handling complaints, offers pathways for unsuccessful applicants, emphasises the importance of monitoring and evaluation, and ensures compliance with legal requirements.

<b>4.2 Ensure that the Guidelines are Applied/Assessment Criteria</b>	This section focuses on the implementation of guidelines. It stresses the importance of adhering to established protocols and ensuring that all RPL processes and practices align with the recommended guidelines to maintain consistency, quality, and fairness across all assessments and interactions.
<b>4.3 Examples of Good Practice in the Field of Quality Assurance</b>	This section provides best practices for maintaining quality in RPL processes. It offers insights into successful strategies and methods used in various contexts to ensure that RPL assessments are fair, reliable, and valid, thereby enhancing the overall credibility and effectiveness of the RPL system.
<b>4.4 Individual Assessment Pathway – The Core of the Work of RPL Practitioners/ RPL assessment phase</b>	This section describes the individual assessment process. It outlines the steps involved in assessing an individual’s prior learning outcomes, from initial application to award of qualification, emphasising the need for a thorough, fair, and transparent process that accurately reflects the applicant’s learning outcomes and achievements assessed against prescribed standards.
<b>4.5 RPL Step-by-step – Rationale, Stakeholders, Explanation, and Examples/ The RPL Process</b>	This section provides a detailed walkthrough of the RPL process. It explains the rationale behind each step, identifies key stakeholders involved, and provides detailed explanations and examples for each stage of the RPL process, including initial information and guidance, administrative registration, application screening and eligibility, preparation of the final assessment, final assessment of learning outcomes, certification of learning outcomes and documentation of the applicants achievement into the Database of National Qualifications.

## 2. What is RPL in Lifelong Learning

### Box 1. Key Take Away Points of Section 2

This section provides a comprehensive understanding of the foundational aspects of RPL, ensuring that practitioners are well-equipped to implement RPL processes effectively:

**Foundational Concepts and Definitions:** This section begins with explaining key terms and concepts related to RPL, providing a clear understanding of what RPL entails and its significance in lifelong learning.

**Conceptual Clarification:** It clarifies various concepts, ensuring that practitioners understand the broad scope of RPL, including its application and the types of learning it recognises.

**Definitions and Examples of RPL:** It provides specific definitions of RPL and illustrates these definitions with concrete examples, making it easier for practitioners to grasp the practical aspects of RPL.

**Institutional Setup Required for RPL:** It outlines the necessary institutional arrangements for effective RPL implementation, including the roles of different stakeholders and the structural requirements.

**Stages of the RPL Process:** It details the stages an individual goes through in the RPL process, from initial inquiry to final qualification, providing a roadmap for practitioners to follow.

**Common Misconceptions About RPL:** It addresses and clarifies common misconceptions about RPL, helping to dispel myths and ensure a correct understanding of the process.

**RPL as a Strategic Policy Tool:** It discusses how RPL can be used strategically as a policy tool to enhance education and workforce development, highlighting its broader societal benefits.

**The Double Currency Paradigm:** It explains the dual benefits of RPL, showing how RPL serves both the educational system and the labour market by recognising diverse learning experiences.

**RPL in Higher Education:** It covers the application of RPL in higher education, detailing how universities and colleges can integrate RPL into their systems to recognise non-traditional learning.

**RPL for Regulated Occupations:** It discusses the specific challenges and solutions related to implementing RPL for qualifications leading to regulated occupations, ensuring that practitioners understand the additional considerations needed in these contexts.

This section is somewhat generic. It aims at providing some background information regarding the RPL ecosystem, rather than focusing on the RPL process only. A review of a possible RPL process will come later in this Handbook. This section is meant to provide the scene so that the reader understands the analysis and recommendations provided in this Handbook.

### 2.1. Quick Reminders

#### 2.1.1. Conceptual Clarification

For practitioners to really grasp what their role will be in the RPL system, this section reminds the reader about some key concepts, in the way they are usually understood in international fora.

**Recognition of prior learning** – or validation/recognition of non-formal and informal learning quite often<sup>1</sup> – has reached the top of the policy agenda in many countries in the world. Recognition of prior learning is a generic name that has the advantage of being understood in most countries but there are in fact many systems for assessing, validating, and recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes (ACQF<sup>2</sup>, Cedefop, European Commission, & ICF, 2019; OECD, 2010). They have different names – e.g., Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition in Canada, Validation of Occupational Learning Outcomes in Morocco – but they all refer to the same idea: all learning outcomes have value, wherever they were acquired, and they should be given currency, and therefore made visible.

The specific objectives may vary but the general aim of recognition of prior learning systems are the same in most countries, especially in Africa: equipping individuals that have learning outcomes with documents to make their achievements visible and to give them currency in society, and especially in the labour market. Recognition by labour market stakeholders is indeed the most prominent goal, so that RPL graduates<sup>3</sup> become more employable. RPL indeed increases employability as successful applicants – or RPL graduates – do not have to provide anecdotal evidence every time they want to be hired for a job, to be promoted, or to be trusted that they possess the learning outcomes they claim they own.

### *Recognition of Qualifications vs. Recognition of Learning Outcomes*

In the context of qualifications systems (ACQF<sup>4</sup>, OECD, 2007), and awarding of qualifications, “recognition” has two rather different, yet connected, meanings.

**1** “recognition of a qualification” is the acceptance that this particular qualification has currency in the labour market and/or in the lifelong learning formal system. In other words, it is the acceptance by the main stakeholders in the labour market and in the lifelong learning formal system that holders of this qualification do possess the learning outcomes that the qualification describes. A typical stakeholder in this context is a recruiter, for instance an employer in the process of hiring new employees. It is therefore essential that s/he recognises the qualification of any job applicant applying to her/his company so that they are hired at the level of responsibility, of autonomy and of wage they deserve; to name a few parameters of a job that are associated with the qualification.



**2** “recognition of learning outcomes” is the process by which what learners have acquired in any sphere – e.g., private, occupational, voluntary work – is assessed and validated to allow for the awarding of credits and/or a full-blown qualification.

As it is clear by now, these two meanings of “recognition” are not specific to the context of RPL. Regarding recognition of qualifications, all vocational education and training providers seek maximum recognition of the qualifications they award, by employers and the society at large. There is clearly a reputation effect in the matter, and long-established providers clearly benefit from a higher reputation. In any case, the full recognition of qualifications awarded is a key parameter for receiving subsidies and attracting learners. It is not specific either when it comes to recognition of learning

---

<sup>1</sup> There are main names throughout the World. See the ACQF II « RPL Campaign ».

<sup>2</sup> <https://acqf.africa/resources/recognition-of-prior-learning>

<sup>3</sup> The term “RPL graduates” is a shortcut to designate RPL applicants that were successful in the RPL assessment and therefore were awarded a qualification. Nevertheless, the qualification itself is not specific and usually, and with reason, the same qualification than the qualification awarded in the formal education and training system.

<sup>4</sup> <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-policy-document-upon-validation-by-au-member-states-en-fr-pt>

outcomes as it is what all education and training providers, including therefore vocational education and training providers, do when they assess their learners with the objective, among others, to award them with a qualification.

Again, the issues with recognition are not specific to the context of RPL, but everything is somewhat more complex with RPL, as the next section shows.

### *Recognition in the Context of Recognition of Prior Learning*

These two acceptations of the term “recognition” are particularly relevant in the context of RPL because achieving recognition in the two senses – recognition of qualifications and recognition of learning outcomes – is highly critical for any RPL system to fly (ILO, 2015; OECD, 2010). And they are achieved through rather different routes.

Recognition of learning outcomes is a technical process and, to that extent, it may be seen as relatively easy. To a large extent, recognition of learning outcomes boils down to assessment and validation of learning outcomes. The assessment is carried out by assessors and lead to the validation – or not – of learning outcomes toward credits, and/or a partial or full qualification. Achieving recognition of learning outcomes needs assessment with, for instance, assessment methods such as demonstration, simulation, observation, portfolio of competences, written examinations, tests, and/or interviews. It also needs qualification or assessment standards, for establishing clear criteria regarding the way applicants will be assessed. It finally needs assessors, and proper training of these assessors because assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes is significantly different from assessing learning outcomes after a course for which the curriculum is clearly identified. This key difference justifies on its own the elaboration of this Handbook.

Recognition of qualifications in the context of RPL is, on the contrary, rather complex because it is a societal process. It takes a lot of effort for a society to accept that a qualification awarded through RPL is a genuine proof of knowledge and skills. Recognition of qualifications achieved in the RPL system needs, among others, the early involvement of actors and other key stakeholders of the labour market and of the lifelong learning and qualifications systems. This is a key early step for creating a sense of ownership among the main users of qualifications, i.e., employers, technical vocational education and training (TVET) providers, and other education and training providers (e.g., higher education institutions if RPL is available in higher education). In fact, evidence suggests that there are more detractors – or at least sceptical stakeholders – than supporters of RPL if this early involvement is not organised in order to create commitment and ensure that all stakeholders accept qualifications achieved in the RPL system as a proof of knowledge and skills.

Most countries have opted for RPL systems whereby the qualifications awarded are exactly the same as the qualifications awarded in the formal education and training system. However, there are always ways to identify that individuals achieved their qualifications after an RPL process, e.g., age of the individual, lack of education and training provider related to the qualification in the CV. Clearly, the lack of societal recognition, and therefore of acceptance of qualifications achieved in the RPL system as genuine proof of knowledge and skills, may put the entire RPL system in jeopardy. To avoid this pitfall, the RPL process should be organised with a convincing quality assurance system.

### *Understanding the Two Meanings of Recognition: Why Does it Matter?*

It is essential to understand the two meanings of the term “recognition” because setting in motion a technically sound and convincing RPL system – with sound assessment, valid qualifications or assessment standards, properly trained recognition of prior learning professionals – is relevant only if the society is ready to accept that awards delivered to successful RPL applicants – e.g., exemption(s), credits or qualifications – are recognised by the society.

It is critical that employers, all labour market stakeholders such as recruiters, TVET providers, higher education institutions, family, and peers accept these awards as proof of knowledge and skills.

### *Competence vs. skill*

Among the terms that may sometimes be confused, there are also ‘competence’ and ‘skill’. The ACQF Glossary (ACQF, 2021) provides a definition for each of the two terms:

- Skill: “A bundle of knowledge, attributes and capacities that can be learnt and that enable individuals to successfully and consistently perform an activity or task and can be built upon and extended through learning.”
- Competence: It “means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.”

Skills are part of the level descriptors and of the learning outcomes. The term ‘competence’ is highly dependent on the cultural context of the country, so its interpretation is different/disparate.

### **2.1.2. What is RPL? – Definitions**

#### *Overview – RPL is Made for Africa and Africa is Made for RPL*

There is wide agreement that individuals learn everywhere and all the time, far beyond the borders of formal learning contexts exemplified by schools, universities, and technical/vocational education and training centres. Nevertheless, there need to be some common work and consensus building regarding the best way to make the corresponding learning outcomes visible, if any. Learning outcomes acquired outside of formal contexts, in everyday life as it were, are indeed hardly documented. Taking advantage of such learning that took place in contexts that are not formal – whether non-formal and/or informal – requires it to be visible and therefore the corresponding learning outcomes to be known. This requires the involvement of all actors and other key stakeholders.

This Handbook therefore aims to assist decision makers, actors, and other key stakeholders to better comprehend what RPL is about; and therefore use existing tools for these learning outcomes to be not only known, but widely recognised, throughout the society and, in particular, in the labour market.

This Handbook focuses on learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal learning contexts; and does not deal with recognition of credentials (including qualifications) being transferred to another context, e.g. for migrants moving from one country to another. This topic constitutes an issue on its own. Nevertheless, it is also true that what is proposed in the context of the ACQF II has value for migrants just as well because it is sometimes faster and easier to re-assess the learning outcomes of newcomers rather than to try to track down their formerly acquired credentials in their country of origin.

This work undertaken in the context of the ACQF II is promising because RPL is made for Africa and Africa is made for RPL, and this Handbook will demonstrate why. For a start, there is the obvious fact that knowledge and skills in Africa are plenty, but very few of them are recognised in a document, such as a qualification. Another fact is that unemployment rates are high and fighting unemployment at the individual level is about making job-seekers more employable. Since employability is oftentimes connected to owning a document describing the knowledge and skills owned by the job seekers, any route to qualification is helping building employability and lowering unemployment rates. Finally, Africa is plagued with the issue of indecent work. Here again, owning a qualification is the best possible way of accessing decent work, and therefore decent wage.

### *Abridged Definition of RPL*

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process by which all the learning outcomes of an individual applicant are assessed against predefined standards, and a document is awarded to successful applicants.

### *Unabridged Definition of RPL*

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is a process by which any set of consistent learning outcomes of an individual, however acquired (i.e. formally, non-formally and/or informally) are given currency through the awarding of an officially recognised document clearly stating what the applicant knows and is able to do (a qualification typically, but not necessarily<sup>1</sup>), and the extent to which they are mastered by the applicant (level); after a thorough quality assured assessment process against predefined [preferably widely agreed] standards that provide a set of criteria, and a norm, for assessing these learning outcomes.

### *Definition of RPL – Setting the Scene*

RPL is a process to make learning outcomes visible if they are consistent with a clearly identified objective – e.g., a qualification, credits toward a qualification, exemption for access – so that these learning outcomes may be used by the owner.

RPL is therefore first and foremost an assessment process. It aims at identifying, documenting and validating outcomes from relevant prior learning gained through life (including formal, non-formal and/or informal), for the purpose of recognising life achievements against a given set of standards.

### *RPL is Sector-based*

The learning outcomes have to be consistent with each other so that they may be reasonably grouped in order to constitute the building blocks to characterise a skills or a set of skills, so that the applicant may set a course toward the labour market (occupation) or toward further learning (another qualification than the qualification awarded in the context of RPL). In an RPL process, the learning outcomes cannot be taken in isolation but are assessed globally. An applicant who would display learning outcomes from several experiences in different, unconnected fields, would probably not succeed. For example, applicants that have experience in car mechanics and cooking may find it difficult to use RPL for the purpose of merging these two experiences with the view of being awarded a qualification.

RPL is therefore mainly about accepting the idea that all human beings learn everywhere and all the time and that the corresponding learning outcomes carry value and should be given currency. It is a general approach to accepting that all learning outcomes should be considered more than a unique one-size-fits-all method. Once stakeholders agree on this general principle, organising RPL concretely becomes extremely easy.

### *RPL is a Process*

RPL is a process, and this should always be borne in mind when organising RPL in practice.

For example, it may take time, and the system should adjust to the pace of the individual applicants who are adults.

Some applicants may find this process too long.

---

<sup>1</sup> This point of what should be awarded to successful RPL applicants will be addressed later in the document. It is a thorny issue. For the sake of brevity, and without loss of generality, it will be assumed for now that RPL applicants are seeking to achieve a qualification when they enrol into an RPL process.

Because it is a process, it means that guidance is provided before and after engaging in RPL.

### *RPL May Have Many Different Names*

The different names that can be found in different countries are:

- ✓ Reconhecimento de competências adquiridas, RCA (Mozambique)
- ✓ Recognition of current competences, RCC (Lesotho)
- ✓ Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition, PLAR (Canada)
- ✓ Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning, APEL (England)
- ✓ Accreditation of Prior Learning or Experience (Ireland)
- ✓ Recognition of Acquired Skills, RAS (Flemish Belgium)
- ✓ Recognition of learning outcomes and competences, RAC (Quebec)
- ✓ Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes, RNFIL (OECD, 2010)
- ✓ Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences, RVCC (Portugal)
- ✓ Validation of experiential learning outcomes, VAE (France)
- ✓ Validation of experiential occupational outcomes, VAEP (Morocco)
- ✓ Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning, VNFIL (Azerbaijan)
- ✓ Review/assessment of actual competences, *realkompetansevurdering*, Norway

RPL is widely used because it is fully understood everywhere, even in the presence of local variations.

### *The Necessary Glossary*

There is no need for an internationally accepted definition of each of the key terms. Nevertheless, for a good understanding of the ideas, concepts and methods proposed here, it may be useful to have a definition for each of the following terms<sup>1</sup>:

- ✓ Validation,
- ✓ Recognition,
- ✓ Assessment,
- ✓ Learning outcomes,
- ✓ Formal learning,
- ✓ Non-formal learning,
- ✓ Informal learning,
- ✓ National qualifications framework,
- ✓ National qualifications system,

---

<sup>1</sup> Only an abridged definition of some of the key terms will be provided in the text. A comprehensive glossary will be provided in Annex.



- ✓ Credits,
- ✓ Qualification,
- ✓ Certification,
- ✓ Competence, and
- ✓ Career guidance.

### 2.1.3. The Supply – i.e., the RPL System set in Motion by a Country

The different steps a government should take to establish an RPL system may include:

<b>1</b>	Identify the strategic issue or the need that necessitates the development of the RPL Policy together with the statement of purpose or justification	
	Develop the Legal and Policy Framework for RPL while ensuring stakeholder involvement, validation and Gazettement and publishing	2
<b>3</b>	Integrate the RPL Policy framework into the existing education and training policies, e.g. the NQF if available, social economic and employment policies	
	Develop guidelines for the implementation of RPL	4
<b>5</b>	Establish a communication policy/strategy, inform about objectives and benefits, and reach out to the most in need stakeholders, whether they be individuals, employers, or organisations	
	Prepare, create or adapt tools, resources, materials and processes (e.g., information leaflets, assessor’s manual or guidance procedures, applicants’ booklets, assessment procedures and tools, assessment standards)	6
<b>7</b>	Carry out publicity and advocacy campaign on RPL	
	Organise the social dialogue, influence stakeholders and organise a sense of ownership (for further commitment to accept the qualifications that will be awarded to future successful RPL applicants).	8
<b>9</b>	Design the institutional/Governance structures for RPL	
	Establish a quality assurance Framework for RPL	10
<b>11</b>	Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	
	Establish a sustainable financing model for RPL	12
<b>13</b>	Carry out a survey to determine the sectors of the economy and occupations with potential for RPL	
	Train staff and RPL practitioners, guidance officers and assessors in the first place	14

<b>15</b>	Develop an assessment and certification framework	
	Develop RPL assessment tools and methods	<b>16</b>
<b>17</b>	Organise [vertical] pilots for the Policy Framework and the instruments, either sector targeted or holistic according to the priority needs	
	Carry out skills gap identification and training for unsuccessful RPL applicants who need additional learning to meet the qualification standards	<b>18</b>
<b>19</b>	Compile results from Monitoring and Evaluation of the pilots	
	Refine the RPL Policy and instruments based on the findings of the Pilot exercise	<b>20</b>
<b>21</b>	Organising the debate among key stakeholders for improving the RPL system	
	Execute mass implementation/ rollout	<b>22</b>
<b>23</b>	Conduct post RPL assessment follow up for successful candidates	
	Carry out impact assessment	<b>24</b>
<b>25</b>	Policy Review after the agreed review period, e.g. 5 years to align to the dynamic labour market and society needs	

Not all stages are equally important, nor they are all necessary. This list is built as a checklist for policy makers to select from. Some stages are more time consuming than other. Finally some are of paramount importance for the success of RPL. For instance, the preparation of a well-trained RPL workforce is key to success. Hence again, the crucial role of this Handbook.

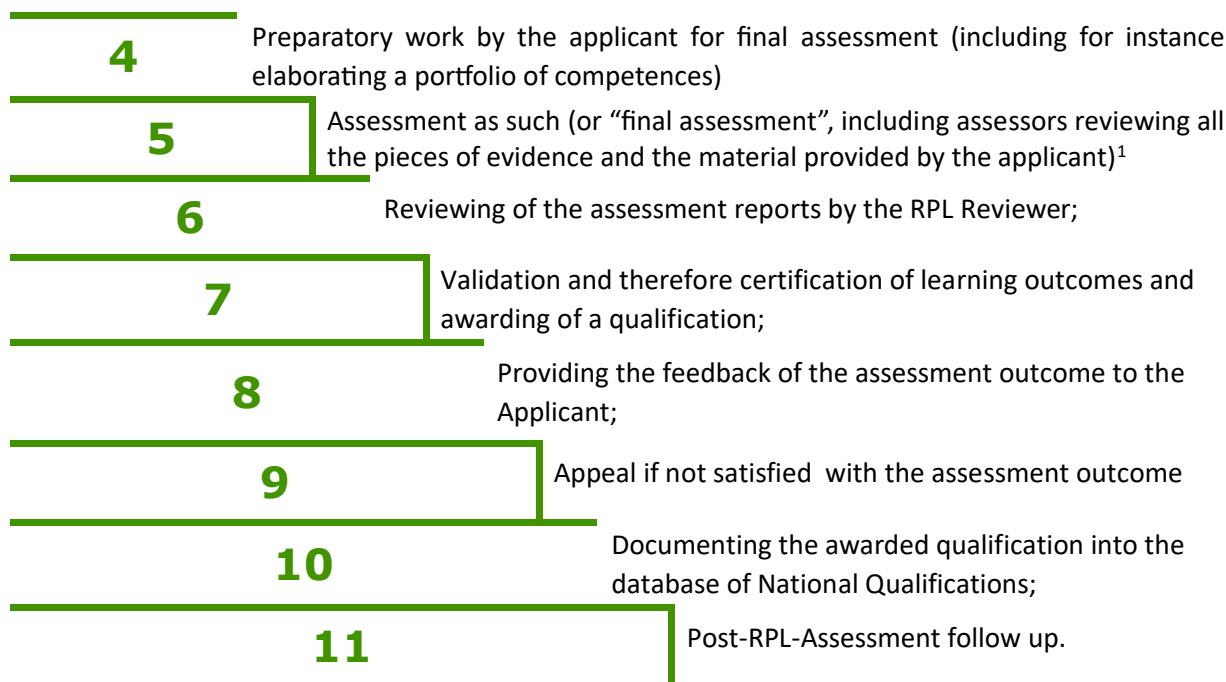
These different steps of the public action are not to be confused with the pathway of individual applicants must follow when engaging in RPL. The former (the supply) will not be addressed here. The latter (the “demand”) relates to the individual pathway RPL applicants have to follow. This is the core of this Handbook because this is the moment when RPL practitioners and RPL applicants are in contact.

#### 2.1.4. The Demand – i.e., the Applicant’s RPL Pathway

When the system is in place (the supply), it may invite applicants (the demand). The different stages an individual applicant goes through when engaging in RPL may be summarised in eleven steps of unequal duration<sup>1</sup>:

- 1** Initial information and guidance, and decision to apply,
- 2** Administrative registration of the individual applicant by the RPL authority
- 3** Pre-screening by the RPL authority (eligibility)

<sup>1</sup> See Section 4 for details.



Some of these stages may be organised in parallel, for example the “preparatory work for final assessment” by the applicant and the “review of the pieces of evidence provided by the applicant”.

Again, this is only a convenient summary, for communication with the broad public and high-level decision makers. For really understanding what the RPL individual process is about, it is advisable to breakdown it down along the lines described in Section 4 (Guidelines in Detail).

### 2.1.5. What RPL is and is not – FAQ

As it is clear by now, the RPL landscape is not complicated (e.g., all stakeholders have interest in common, what needs to be done is rather straightforward, the different options RPL offers have clear implications), but it is somewhat complex (e.g., the possible objectives are many, the terms and concepts may be used in a slightly different way than everyday language).

This section therefore clarifies what experience shows to be the most frequently asked questions. For easy reading, these questions are addressed side by side indicating what RPL is and is not on the same line (Table 1).

**Table 1. What RPL is... and is not**

<b>RPL is...</b>	<b>RPL is not...</b>
RPL is a coordinated and integrated approach to education , employment and social policies.	RPL is not a standalone initiative
RPL is <u>cheaper</u> than formal education and training alternatives, because it makes visible what RPL applicants already know or can do.	RPL is not <u>free</u> and not necessarily cheap.

<sup>1</sup> The full process is about assessment, but it is convenient to call this particular stage “assessment” as well, because this where this is where it all comes together. For the sake of clarity, this handbook will call this stage “final assessment”.

RPL is about the already acquired competences.	RPL is not about Education and Training.
RPL, in the most efficient systems, works hand-in-hand with the <u>formal education and training system</u> (e.g., for positioning future learners, for sharing assessment procedures, for sharing qualifications standards, for preparing competent staff, especially assessors).	RPL is <u>not a competitor</u> to the formal education and training system.
RPL assessment is about ascertaining whether applicants <u>already</u> possess required learning outcomes (are competent) which can only be determined via a thorough and quality-assured assessment process, based on <u>authentic assessment</u> (i.e. actually assessing applicants doing or explaining about what they are being assessed on, as opposed to remotely connected assessment).	RPL does not assess the <u>input</u> process nor the context of the learning.
RPL assesses the learning outcomes, which is in line with <u>modern</u> approaches: it is what people know and can do that matters.	RPL does not assess the <u>time</u> for learning nor how much <u>experience</u> a person has (a person may learn or work for ten years and still not possess the required learning outcomes).
RPL is about providing people who appear to possess the <u>required</u> learning outcomes and who are in need of a qualification. It provides them with the <u>opportunity</u> to have their learning outcomes assessed, validated and recognised, and potentially receive a qualification.	RPL does not <u>award</u> qualifications to anyone unless they possess the required learning outcomes. RPL is not about providing qualifications to <u>all</u> individuals in a society regardless of what they know and can do.
RPL is about creating a more <u>equitable</u> system providing a second chance for qualifications for people possessing learning outcomes not yet recognised.	RPL is not about awarding <u>undeserved</u> qualifications, credits or exemptions.
RPL is about assessing and recognising learning outcomes a person already possesses. RPL is a second chance of qualification.	RPL is not a second chance of <u>education and training</u> .
RPL may inform applicants and assessors about <u>additional</u> learning outcomes that an applicant requires to fulfil the requirements of a qualification (e.g., the necessary learning outcomes corresponding to the preparation phase of the assessment: patience, hard work, organisation, articulation).	RPL does not <u>create</u> the learning outcomes that are being assessed.

### 2.1.6. RPL – A Policy Tool

#### *RPL Offers a Continuum of Options – Flexibility*

Most learning in an individual's life takes place in non-formal and informal contexts, whether at work, at home, or in activities connected to volunteering or even leisure. In fact, in many countries with high school dropout rates, a fair fraction of young adults acquires learning outcomes non-formally and informally.

Informal apprenticeship, for instance, is the most common mode for acquiring knowledge and skills in Africa. However, in the absence of a qualification to attest these knowledge and skills acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, they face severe disadvantages as far as finding decent jobs, migrating to other regions and accessing further education and training.

Policy makers and researchers have realised the power of RPL to equip individuals with proven and tested qualifications, genuinely mirroring knowledge and skills. RPL is therefore now seen as a policy tool and is at the top of the agenda in many countries around the world.

RPL is a policy tool also because it is flexible. Policy makers may use it to match their need, as RPL has the capacity to:

- ✓ Provide credible – financially and technically – solutions for addressing the key questions and issues in the public policies domain: e.g., decent jobs through the improvement of individual qualification, business climate through the improvement of the collective level of qualification, unemployment through the improvement of individual employability, working poor, enterprise productivity, occupational and geographical mobility.
- ✓ Fit perfectly under the general umbrella of lifelong learning, as learning outcomes acquired non-formally and informally are acquired throughout life.
- ✓ Complement the formal education and training system and fill some gaps in it.
- ✓ Share key concepts (e.g., learning outcomes, transparency) with other modern policy tools such as qualifications frameworks (NQFs), and credits accumulation and transfer systems (CATs).
- ✓ Be flexible regarding its outcomes (from a simple certificate to credits or to a full qualification). It is flexible also to the extent that the assessment process may recommend further learning, in the formal system, or additional experience.
- ✓ Be flexible regarding the groups of the population it targets and therefore regarding the way individual and collective needs are addressed (e.g., unemployed people, migrants, returnees, jobseekers, non-participants in the labour market).
- ✓ Be flexible regarding the way it is organised (e.g., there are many options for assessing participants/ RPL is Applicant centred).
- ✓ Help rethinking education and training systems (competences-based curriculum, quality assurance, modularisation of the training provision).
- ✓ Propose actual and effective solutions for promoting equity and social inclusion.
- ✓ Be a cost-effective approach to improving the distribution of qualifications within a company, a region or a country.
- ✓ Offer solutions at all levels of governance: from the very local to the national, and from the micro to the macro levels.

### *Recognition of Prior Learning and National Qualifications Frameworks are Close Siblings*

Discussions about organising RPL and establishing an NQF are central in the context of the ACQF. The two approaches have a lot in common and should therefore be considered together.

RPL and NQFs have the concept of learning outcomes in common. They both bring transparency to qualifications, knowledge and skills. They both promote access and equity, and it is very likely that one will not happen without the other in many countries. These commonalities probably explain the attempt to address both of them at the same time.

The qualifications framework classifies and articulates the qualifications awarded after an assessment; the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes system aims at assessing these learning outcomes. Having established a qualifications framework therefore greatly facilitates the establishment of an RPL system.

Therefore, Recognition of Prior Learning is one of the tools used to implement the National Qualifications Frameworks.

### *For Whom RPL is? – The Main Target Group*

RPL is about recognising learning outcomes that have not been validated and/or recognised yet. To that extent, the typical target group for RPL systems is therefore the group of individuals who have acquired learning outcomes irrespective of how, where and when that have not been formally recognised yet, or that lack a corresponding qualification. In this latter case, the issue is whether the country has the option to create a qualification that would be offered only in the RPL system.

Only some countries have an explicit minimum age limit (e.g., 17 in Tanzania). Most countries do not impose an age limit in their RPL regulation. Nevertheless, most countries impose a relevant experience in line with the targeted qualification. This implies that very young people are somewhat excluded because they cannot demonstrate the necessary experience.

### *RPL- Many Possible Outcomes*

In the most advanced system, RPL may lead to the awarding of a full qualification to successful applicants, but this does not have to be the case. There are many alternatives and the principle of RPL, which is to recognise that all learning may have value, is always respected. Currency may be given through the direct awarding of a qualification (i.e. without additional formal learning) to successful applicants, and the other options are:



Exemption of academic prerequisite to access the formal education and training system and resume studies in the lifelong learning formal system, for example to access tertiary education without any upper secondary qualification.



Exemption of all or part of the curriculum in a formal programme.



Credits toward a qualification, or partial validation or microcredential.



Certificate of labour market skills, with currency in a region, an industry sector, or even a company; therefore with limited currency, oftentimes based on bilateral agreement between the certifying body and a sector or an employer organisation (e.g., for applying for a job in a particular industry sector or region).



Any document stating what the owner knows and is able to do (skills).

These options are not mutually exclusive, and it is a key decision for countries to make sure that they are in control of their RPL system. This is also why the RPL system is a policy tool, since it allows countries to act where they need the most some change in the system.

As mentioned earlier, for the sake of this document, it is assumed that achieving a complete qualification is the ultimate objective of all applicants and this Handbook is written accordingly, but the reader – i.e., decision maker – has to bear in mind that all options are always possible. It is even conceivable that the system is upgraded little by little. It would be of absolute relevance to start an RPL system with only some features and to upscale as expertise and confidence grow in the country.

### **2.1.7. RPL and the Double Currency Paradigm**

When it leads to the awarding of a full-fledged qualification (as opposed to just exemption for access to the formal education and training system for example), RPL may be considered as bringing two sets of benefits to RPL graduates.

A qualification awarded after an RPL process allows RPL graduates to use this qualification:

- in the formal education and training system, for studying and achieving a higher level of qualification, and/or
- in the labour market, for occupational promotion at the same workplace, or changing employment;
- in the society for self-esteem or societal recognition.

### **2.1.8. RPL as a Powerful Mechanism for Promoting Lifelong Learning**

RPL is usually considered as a strong mechanism to promote lifelong learning. This is because it possesses a double currency, as mentioned above, and therefore is a stepping stone to (re)enter the formal education and training system.

Beyond that, RPL is conducive to lifelong learning because it provides confidence to individual (self-)learners:

- It is a positive approach: the RPL system is geared toward putting forward what individual applicants know and can do.
- It is a second of qualification and adults usually know the (societal) value of a qualification, beyond the sole labour market as it were.

### **2.1.9. RPL as a Powerful Mechanism for Innovation**

RPL directly connects the labour market stakeholders – typically the employers – and the TVET and higher education (HE) systems through assessment. This is because professionals as well as TVET and HE stakeholders are oftentimes involved in the preparation of the assessment (e.g., to elaborate qualifications standards) and/or the assessment itself of RPL applicants. Also the learning context is industry or work-based, hence the RPL applicants learn on the job and are subjected to current occupational standards in the labour market. Therefore, the link between the expectations of the

labour market and the possession of certain knowledge and skills is directly established. To that extent, the RPL approach has the potential to feed back into the TVET and HE systems and to bring innovation the way the formal TVET and HE systems are organised. RPL is a powerful driver for innovation.

In addition, the RPL approach brings innovation in the TVET and HE systems also in the way it organises and controls the identification, assessment, and certification of learning outcomes (e.g., by using modern/flexible portfolio of competences, by mobilising occupation standards to re-write qualifications standards).

RPL brings about a new paradigm and it has a lot of potential for rethinking the formal education and training systems, in all its sub-sectors.

### **2.1.10. RPL in Higher Education**

There are several reasons for considering developing RPL in the context of higher education:

#### ***Inclusive Access***



RPL is a powerful tool for promoting inclusive access to higher education by providing opportunities for individuals who may not have qualifications but possess relevant experience, knowledge and skills. Traditional admission criteria often heavily rely on formal academic credentials, which can exclude many capable and experienced individuals from accessing higher education. By recognising and valuing prior learning, institutions can open their doors to a broader range of applicants, including mature students, working professionals, and those from non-traditional learning backgrounds.

For example, a person who has gained extensive experience and expertise in project management through years of work in the field, but lacks a formal degree, can be admitted to a relevant degree programme based on their demonstrated learning outcomes. This approach not only diversifies the student population but also enriches the learning environment by bringing in varied perspectives and experiences.

It will also increase the size of the group of potential higher education students by opening to virtually the entire adult population. Inclusive access through RPL thus helps bridge the gap between formal education and practical experience, making higher education more attainable for a wider audience.

#### ***Lifelong Learning***



RPL supports the concept of lifelong learning by acknowledging that learning is a continuous process that occurs throughout an individual's life and not just within formal learning contexts. This recognition encourages individuals to engage in ongoing education and professional development, knowing that their prior experiences and non-formal and informal learning outcomes will be recognised. For instance, professionals who attend workshops, training programmes, or self-study to keep up with industry advancements can have these learning experiences recognised and credited towards a higher education qualification.

This not only motivates individuals to continue their personal and professional growth but also ensures that their learning outcomes are formally acknowledged, potentially leading to career advancement and personal fulfilment.

By promoting lifelong learning, RPL helps to create a more dynamic and adaptable workforce, capable of meeting the evolving demands of the modern economy. It also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge acquisition, which is beneficial for both individuals and society as a whole.



### *Skills Utilisation*



RPL enables higher education institutions to make efficient use of the learning outcomes that learners already possess and reduce redundancy in the learning process. When students enter a programme leading to a higher education qualification with significant prior experience and learning outcomes, traditional education systems often require them to repeat foundational courses they are already proficient in. This can lead to frustration and disengagement. Through RPL, these [future] students can receive credits for their existing learning outcomes, allowing them to focus on acquiring new more advanced learning outcomes.

For example, an experienced ICT professional may bypass introductory courses in computer science and proceed directly to more specialised and advanced subjects. This not only makes the educational journey more relevant and engaging for the student but also optimises the use of educational resources. By recognising and utilising prior learning, institutions can design more tailored and effective learning pathways, ultimately enhancing the overall educational experience and outcomes for students.

### *Workforce Development*



RPL plays a crucial role in workforce development by enabling individuals to upskill or reskill through higher education based on their existing learning outcomes. In today's fast-paced and ever-changing labour market, the ability to adapt and acquire new knowledge and skills is essential in career success. RPL facilitates this by allowing workers to leverage their prior learning outcomes to gain academic qualifications more efficiently.

For instance, an employee in the manufacturing industry who has gained technical skills on the job can use RPL to earn credits towards an engineering degree, increasing their level of qualification and enhancing their career prospects. This not only benefits the individual but also addresses the skills gaps in the workforce, helping employers to meet the demands of a competitive economy. Moreover, RPL-supported workforce development initiatives can be strategically aligned with industry needs, ensuring that the education provided is relevant and directly applicable to real-world challenges. This alignment enhances the employability of graduates and contributes to a more competent and versatile workforce.

### *Equity and Social Justice*



Countries around the world are using RPL in higher education systems to promote equity and social justice by providing educational opportunities to marginalised groups who may have been excluded from formal education systems. Many individuals, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, minorities, or those with interrupted education histories, possess significant knowledge and skills acquired through life and work experiences. Traditional educational pathways often fail to recognise these non-formal and informal learning experiences, perpetuating social inequalities. RPL helps to break down these barriers by validating and accrediting the learning outcomes that occurs outside formal contexts.

For example, first nations communities with rich cultural knowledge and practical skills can have these experiences recognised for academic credit. This recognition empowers individuals, enhances their educational and career prospects, and promotes social mobility. By implementing RPL, higher education institutions can contribute to a more just and equitable society, ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to achieve their educational and professional aspirations regardless of their background.

As a matter of fact, RPL is already used around the world in the higher education system. This is the way how RPL is actually implemented in practice:

### Assessment of Prior learning



There are different methods of assessing prior learning. The choice of assessment method is determined by the type of applicant and the learning context of individual applicants. Some of the most commonly used assessment methods are discussed below;

#### *Portfolio Assessment*

Assessment of portfolio of competences is a comprehensive method used by higher education institutions to assess prior learning outcomes. Prospective students compile a portfolio that typically includes a detailed CV, work samples, project descriptions, professional certificates, and/or testimonials from employers or colleagues, and provide their own assessment of their learning outcomes (reflexive thinking). This portfolio is designed to provide a thorough representation of the applicant's knowledge and skills acquired in contexts that are not formal.

For example, a professional who has worked in marketing for several years may include campaign reports, client feedback, and certificates from short courses attended. The portfolio is then reviewed by faculty or a dedicated RPL assessment team, who assess the evidence against the learning outcomes of specific courses or programmes. This process allows students to gain credits for the learning outcomes they already have, thus reducing the time and cost required to complete a higher education qualification (degree). By formally recognising the practical experience and all learning outcome of future students, portfolio assessment fosters a more inclusive and equitable approach to higher education.

#### *Credit Transfer*



Credit transfer through RPL enables students to use their previously acquired learning outcomes to earn academic credits towards a higher education programme. This is particularly beneficial for students who have completed professional qualifications, vocational training, or even parts of other higher education programmes that are relevant to their current field of study.

For instance, a military veteran with extensive experience in logistics and supply chain management seeks to pursue a bachelor's degree in business administration. Throughout their military career, they have completed various accredited training programmes and have accumulated years of practical experience in managing complex supply chains, overseeing procurement processes, and coordinating large-scale logistical operations. Recognising the relevance of this experience, the university evaluates the veteran's prior learning outcomes against the curriculum of the business administration programme. Through a thorough assessment process, including a review of military transcripts, certificates, and a detailed portfolio of professional accomplishments, the institution determines that the veteran's knowledge and skills are equivalent to several core courses in the degree programme, such as "Introduction to Supply Chain Management," "Operations Management," and "Procurement and Contract Management." As a result, the veteran is granted academic credits for these courses, allowing her/him to bypass these subjects and focus on more advanced topics and electives within the programme. This credit transfer not only acknowledges the value of the veteran's prior learning outcomes but also accelerates their path to obtaining a higher education qualification. It reduces redundancy by ensuring they do not need to relearn concepts they are already proficient in, making their educational journey more efficient and relevant. This approach also supports the veteran's transition to civilian life by leveraging their military experience towards academic and career advancement in the business field. Through credit transfer, the university demonstrates its

commitment to recognising diverse learning pathways and facilitating the integration of experienced professionals into higher education.

### *Challenge Examinations*



Challenge examinations offer a practical and efficient way for current higher education students to demonstrate their proficiency in specific subject areas and earn academic credits without attending regular classes. These examinations are designed to test the knowledge and skills that students have acquired through work experience, self-study, or learning in contexts that are not necessarily formal.

For example, a software developer with extensive experience in programming can take a challenge examination to bypass introductory courses in a computer science degree programme. These examinations typically cover the key concepts, theories, and practical applications of the subject matter, ensuring that students have a comprehensive understanding comparable to that of students who completed the course in the traditional way. The use of challenge examinations allows institutions to validate the learning outcomes of students in a formal and standardised manner. It also provides a flexible pathway for learners to progress through their education at their own pace, making higher education more accessible and accommodating to diverse learning styles and experiences.

### *Interviews and Learning Outcomes Assessments*



Interviews and assessments are personalised approaches used by higher education institutions to assess the prior learning outcomes of prospective students. These methods involve direct interaction between the applicant and the assessors, which may include faculty members, industry experts, or RPL coordinators.

For example, in a nursing programme, an applicant with years of experience as a nursing assistant may undergo a series of interviews and practical assessments to demonstrate their clinical knowledge and skills<sup>1</sup>. During the interview, assessors ask targeted questions to assess the applicant's understanding of theoretical concepts, practical applications, and problem-solving abilities. The assessment of learning outcomes may involve simulations, practical demonstrations, or case studies where applicants showcase their expertise in real-world scenarios. This approach provides a holistic assessment of the applicant's capabilities, ensuring that their prior learning outcomes meet the standards required for advanced standing in the programme. By acknowledging the depth and breadth of an applicant's experience, interviews and assessments facilitate their smooth transition into higher education, recognising and valuing their practical expertise.

### *Gap Training*



Gap training is a strategic approach used by higher education institutions to bridge the learning outcomes gaps identified during the RPL assessment process. This method is particularly useful for applicants whose prior learning outcomes are substantial but not entirely aligned with the requirements of the desired higher education qualification programme.

For instance, an engineer from another country may have significant experience and education, but certain local standards or specific technical knowledge may be missing. Gap training involves tailored coursework or modules that focus on these specific areas, enabling the applicant to meet the academic and professional standards required by the institution. This training can be delivered through various formats, including online courses, workshops, or intensive short-term programmes. The objective is to ensure that the applicant is fully prepared to integrate into the higher education

---

<sup>1</sup> In some countries, regulated occupations – such as health occupations typically, e.g., in France – are not open to RPL. The argument is that there is no way for individuals to have experience in practicing health since the license to practice is submitted to stringent requirements.

programme and succeed academically. Gap training thus supports the inclusivity and adaptability of higher education, allowing students from diverse backgrounds to leverage their prior learning while addressing any deficiencies in their existing learning outcomes.

### **Articulation Agreements**



Articulation agreements are formal partnerships between higher education institutions and other organisations, such as employers, industry bodies, or training providers, to recognise prior learning outcomes and facilitate seamless transitions into higher education qualification programmes. These agreements outline the specific terms and conditions under which credits, or advanced standing, are granted based on the prior learning experiences of the applicants. For example, a community college may have an articulation agreement with a local university, allowing students who complete a vocational programme in healthcare to transfer credits towards a bachelor's qualification in nursing. These agreements are often developed through collaborative efforts, ensuring that the curriculum and learning outcomes of the training programmes align with those of the higher education institution. Articulation agreements provide clear and structured pathways for students, reducing uncertainty and simplifying the process of credit transfer. They also enhance the relevance and applicability of higher education by acknowledging and incorporating the practical knowledge and skills gained through vocational training.

### **Flexible Admission Policies**



Flexible admission policies in higher education are designed to accommodate a wide range of applicants by considering their prior learning and experiences alongside traditional academic qualifications. These policies recognise that valuable learning outcomes can be acquired through diverse routes, including work experience, non-formal and informal learning, and personal development.

For instance, a master's programme in public administration may accept applicants based on a combination of professional experience, prior coursework, and a portfolio of relevant projects, rather than solely relying on an undergraduate qualification. Such policies typically involve a comprehensive review process where the applicant's achievements and potential are assessed holistically. This may include interviews, personal statements, and recommendations in addition to the assessment of prior learning outcomes. By adopting flexible admission policies, higher education institutions can attract a diverse student body, tapping into a wider talent pool and promoting inclusivity. These policies also support non-traditional learners in accessing advanced education, enabling them to enhance their careers and contribute to their fields with a solid academic foundation.

#### **2.1.11. RPL for Qualifications Leading to a Regulated Occupations**

RPL is meant to be an approach suitable for all sectors – whether VET or HE – and all sort of contexts. However, many countries have decided to exclude qualifications leading to a regulated occupations, typically in the health sector. The issues are many:

#### **Stringent Qualification Requirements**

Regulated occupations often require individuals to meet specific qualification and licensing standards to ensure they possess the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties safely and effectively. These standards are typically high and non-negotiable, given the potential impact on public health, safety, and welfare. This rigidity can make it challenging to validate and recognise prior learning outcomes that may not align perfectly with formal qualifications standards, thus complicating the RPL process.

### *Standardisation and Consistency*

Consistency in RPL assessments is crucial to maintain trust and credibility in the qualification process. This applies even more to regulated occupations. Achieving standardisation across different institutions and regions can be difficult in this case. Variations in qualification standards, assessment criteria, methods, and assessor judgments can lead to inconsistencies that undermine the fairness and reliability of RPL, making it a contentious issue for regulatory bodies that demand uniformity to uphold occupational standards.

### *Complexity of Competence Mapping*

Mapping prior learning outcomes to the specific knowledge and skills required in a regulated occupation involves a detailed and often complex process. This task requires a thorough understanding of both the formal qualification requirements and the individual's prior experiences. Assessors must be able to translate diverse and non-formal learning experiences into criteria listed in qualification standards, which can be particularly challenging when those experiences vary widely in scope and relevance.

### *Evidence of Learning Outcomes*

Proving the existence of learning outcomes in relation to regulated occupations often necessitates practical, hands-on experience in addition to theoretical knowledge. Collecting, verifying, and assessing evidence of prior practical experience and the corresponding learning outcomes can be challenging. The nature of the evidence required may vary, including work samples, references, performance appraisals, and more, which puts the consistency of the assessment process at risk.

### *Regulatory Body Acceptance*

Even when educational institutions recognise prior learning outcomes through RPL, regulatory bodies governing the occupations may have additional or different requirements. These bodies may be sceptical of RPL assessments or may not accept them as equivalent to formal qualifications<sup>1</sup> altogether, therefore creating a barrier for individuals seeking a qualification or a license to practice through RPL.

### *Time and Cost*

The RPL process can be both time-consuming and costly in the context of regulated occupations. Applicants may need to gather extensive documentation and undergo multiple assessments, while assessing bodies must invest in highly trained personnel and robust assessment systems. In regulated occupations, where the stakes are high, the thoroughness may mean that the cost are a strong deterrent to establishing an RPL system.

### *Stakeholder Buy-in*

Gaining the support and trust of all stakeholders – including employers, professional associations, and potential RPL applicants – can be challenging. Some stakeholders may have reservations about the validity and reliability of RPL, fearing it could dilute occupational standards. Others may lack awareness or understanding of the process, leading to reluctance or resistance in its adoption and implementation.

---

<sup>1</sup> There is nothing more formal than a qualification, and the adjective formal is therefore redundant. Nevertheless, it is kept throughout this document when there is a need to stress the formal character of the qualification.

## **Continuous Professional Development**

Many regulated occupations require practitioners to engage in continuous professional development to maintain their qualification. RPL processes need to not only recognise prior learning outcomes but also integrate ongoing learning requirements. This dynamic aspect adds another layer of complexity, as the RPL framework must be adaptable and capable of assessing both initial knowledge and skills and ongoing professional development activities.

## **Policy and Legal Barriers**

Existing laws and regulations governing many regulated occupations may not be designed to accommodate RPL processes. Legislative and policy frameworks often need to be updated to recognise and support RPL, which can be a slow and challenging process. Without supportive policies, RPL initiatives may face significant legal and bureaucratic hurdles, limiting their effectiveness and reach.

## **Quality Assurance**

Ensuring high quality assurance standards in RPL assessments is essential, particularly in regulated occupations where public trust and safety are paramount. Any compromise in the quality of RPL assessments can lead to questions about the actual learning outcomes of individuals that have been awarded a qualification after an RPL process. Thus, stringent quality assurance mechanisms must be in place to monitor and evaluate the RPL process continually, ensuring it meets the rigorous standards expected by regulatory bodies and the public, which may be a strong deterrent for regulated occupations.

### **2.2. Quality Assurance in Recognition of Prior Learning**

For the purpose of this Handbook, quality assurance is a method and a process, the reality of which can be verified, which allows the assessment of the learning outcomes of RPL applicants with a reasonable percentage of correspondence between the qualification/assessment standards used and the reality of their achievements. The quality-assured RPL process must meet a set of clearly identified conditions so that the outcomes of the RPL process – typically, the awarding or not of a qualification after the RPL assessment – are consistent with the learning outcomes actually owned by the applicant.

Lack of quality assurance will not prevent the RPL process from occurring and being completed, but no one can guarantee that successful applicants (i.e., RPL graduates) have all the learning outcomes corresponding to the qualification – qualifications standards to be precise – they have just been awarded, and that failed applicants do not.

Quality assurance is not only a matter of quality, so that African countries and their population can benefit the most from their RPL system, but also a matter of equity, so that all applicants are assessed in the same way throughout each African country.

It takes years to build trust in an RPL system. It takes only a few months before the lack of quality destroys this trust. It is therefore of paramount importance that RPL practitioners understand the issues at stake regarding quality assurance.

#### **2.2.1. RPL – A Specific Area for Quality Assurance**

RPL is a special case in the world of qualifications, and therefore in the work of quality assurance, because the process of acquiring learning outcomes – i.e., how learning outcomes were achieved, the input process as it were – is unknown. Almost by definition of RPL – which is first and foremost an assessment of learning outcomes – the process of acquiring learning outcomes is not necessarily something assessors should know about. Of course, assessors oftentimes ask applicants where and

how they acquired such and such learning outcomes or a particular skill, but it is the learning outcomes possessed at the time of assessment that matter, not the input process.

In practice, this means that it is not possible to apply quality assurance to the input process, which is by far the longest process compared to assessment, and which would have offered a lot of opportunities to apply quality assurance rules. In the field of RPL, it is not possible to apply quality assurance, for example, to teacher training, to the required qualification level of the teachers, to education and training institutions (e.g., equipment, tools), to the elaboration process of the curricula, and/or to the teaching materials used to acquire the learning outcomes being assessed; all being related to the input process, i.e., how RPL applicants have acquired their learning outcomes.

Simply put, the only real opportunity to establish a quality assurance procedure is at the time of the assessment of the RPL applicants, which is the core of the approach. This is both the main occasion during which the RPL practitioners and the applicant meet and the important moment to establish the decision to validate and recognise the learning outcomes of the applicant. Of course, the time of the assessment may be taken quite widely and include information and guidance as well as the qualification process. It is called assessment time to distinguish it from the learning process that takes place beforehand and is out of the reach of the RPL professionals.

In general, it is very important to understand that it is not possible to assess applicants in the RPL system in the same way as pupils at schools, students at university, learners in the TVET centre, or learners in the formal education and training system in general are assessed. Assessment methods are siblings, and they must refer to the exact same qualification/assessment standards, but they are different. For example, written tests are not effective nor efficient in the RPL approach, especially for RPL applicant with literacy issues in the language of the assessment. It is therefore equally illusory to want to establish a quality assurance system identical to the one existing in the formal education and training system.

This proximity between the yet different education/training and RPL systems is interesting to amplify for practitioners to grasp the essence of RPL. The formal education and training system and the RPL system are siblings because there is no difference in essence between assessing pupils' and students' learning outcomes in the formal education and training system and the learning outcomes of applicants in the RPL system. In both cases, it is about verifying that the learning outcomes of the applicants for the qualification match the corresponding qualification/assessment standards. The procedure can be random in both the RPL system and in the formal education and training system. In other words, it is not necessary to assess all expected learning outcomes in either case. It is agreeable to assess a selection of learning outcomes and to infer about this sort of random sample that the applicant possesses the learning outcomes described in the qualifications standard. In practice learners aiming for a qualification are never thoroughly assessed for all possible learning outcomes (with few exceptions such as airplane pilots or health related occupations, because many lives are at stake in both cases, and the learning outcomes must be sound and complete).

The assessment, in either case, always aims at verifying that the applicant has a potential to rapidly be a good professional accepting that professionalism comes with experience. This is true in the formal education and training system, and this is also true in the RPL system. Just by way of example, individuals that have just been awarded a driving license cannot be good drivers. It is only after years of experience that driving skills become solid.

Overall, the key message is that **only the assessment changes with RPL, the qualification/assessment standards must be the same**. Using the same standards than the formal education and training is the only way to convince stakeholders potentially not knowledgeable regarding what RPL is about that successful RPL applicants should be kept in equal esteem as formal education and training graduates.

### 2.2.2. Important Special Cases and Solutions

Two specific cases – highly likely to appear in a near future – need to be brought to the attention of RPL practitioners.

Firstly, if qualifications/assessment standards do not exist in the formal education and training system and if those are qualifications that a country decides or believes should be available to individual through RPL, then qualification/assessment standards can be elaborated on purpose, only for qualifications awarded in the RPL system. This situation arises for instance when qualifications that do not exist in the formal education and training system yet are potentially demanded in the labour market and correspond to a high level of employability (e.g., call centres operators are highly sought professionals, but few countries have a provision for awarding such qualifications in the formal education and training system; the same holds for many green occupations connected to recycling activities).

It is even possible for the RPL to feed back into the formal education and training system so that those qualifications are also prepared in the formal education and training system. This would mean that, after the qualification standards, curricula would be elaborated, based on the lessons learnt in the RPL approach. This would put the RPL professionals at the core of the reform of the formal education and training system, the TVET system typically, but not only it.

The second special case is a sub case of the first one. It may happen indeed that a particular position in the labour market requests that applicants for this position possess specific knowledge and skills and the corresponding certificate, even if this certificate does not exist because it is not a full-fledged qualification (e.g., Reception and Cloakroom Officer). This happens more and more often also when employers do not need all the knowledge and skills that are attached to a qualification (e.g., car mechanic is an occupation than can be broken down in diesel operator, gas engine operator, steering component operator and a few more sub-occupations as it were). In other words, it may well happen that a high level of employability is associated with only some elements of a qualification, and that finding a job does not require a full qualification but some elements of it, as long as they are certified by a competent body.

In this particular case, micro-credentials offer a credible solution to the extent that:

- They allow assessment, validation, recognition and awarding of a certificate with high level of quality assurance.
- They can easily be registered in the National Qualifications Framework, so they become part of the National Qualifications System as fraction of qualifications.

This approach would provide opportunities for individuals to build a full qualification by accumulating micro-credentials over several years, up to a decade. This would correspond to the true meaning of lifelong learning.

In the context of RPL, this is an extremely promising approach because that would remove the pressure on the shoulders of potential RPL applicants that oftentimes drop out during the RPL assessment process because of the heavy investment that preparing the RPL assessment for a full qualification means. Potential applicants could very well organise their RPL over several sessions and still be employable in between each session since they would be awarded micro-credential after each assessment session.

This approach requires that two conditions are met:

- Employers accept micro-credentials as proofs of knowledge and skills and accept to hire micro-credentials holders even if they do not have a full qualification.



- Qualifications in the formal education and training and/or in the RPL system are broken down in micro-credentials, i.e., block of competences that are organised in a relevant way and that have standards – “micro-credentials standards” as it were – in order to make the assessment possible.

### 2.2.3. RPL – The Encounter of a System and an Individual...

As suggested above, RPL is the encounter of an individual (the demand) and a system (the supply). In order for the individual to be informed that RPL exists, and then eventually applies, there must be a supply, or offer, or provision. There needs to be a system that is operational with, for example, a communication strategy, a system for assessing learning outcomes and a system for validating and certifying these learning outcomes; and therefore recognise that there truly are prior learning outcomes.

Quality assurance focuses only on supply; that is, again, about what the country implements – the RPL body, on behalf of the Ministry of Education or of the Ministry of Labour, or both – so that individuals can obtain recognition of all their learning outcomes, regardless of the context in which they were acquired, and the corresponding qualification (or partial qualification, or micro-credential).

### 2.2.4. ... with an Intermediate Level: The Network of RPL Centres

In fact, beyond RPL body/ministry in charge and the individual applicants, the landscape has a third level: the RPL centres or, oftentimes, the future RPL centres that are to be established. The RPL body is indeed in a position to regulate, and it should only do so. In other words, it is highly recommended that it delegates other operationalisation of the RPL. This is not always easy to do when a country is in the elaboration or even pilot phase, but it will become evident when it is generalised to the whole country – the scale up process is inevitable for equity and efficiency reasons – and to all educational sectors and all industries. Ensuring that RPL is organised under the best quality conditions throughout the country for the entire population requires the delegation of the RPL operations, whether to dedicated centres (only RPL) or hybrid centres (TEVT and RPL). This work of identifying and accrediting centres remains to be done in many African countries, and it is essential to do so with quality assurance as a permanent specific objective.

In addition, it is part of the quality assurance criteria that the operator and the regulator are not the same to avoid conflicts of interest, to prevent the RPL body from being judge and party when making key decisions that involve the entire RPL system, and all its stakeholders, for the coming years. Again, it is important to keep in mind that it takes years to build trust in RPL, and it is only a few months before the lack of quality destroys it.

The establishment of RPL centres throughout a country makes it necessary for RPL practitioners to be prepared in a homogeneous way so that decisions regarding RPL assessment are consistent across the county, and therefore fair.

### 2.2.5. Risk Associated with Quality Assurance in the Context of RPL

#### *A Difficult Choice Between Certainty and Complexity – A Necessary Pragmatism*

The establishment of a quality assurance system in RPL is good governance. The issue for any RPL body is to decide the level of assurance to be established. If the level of assurance is too high, i.e., if the guidelines impose too many strict conditions, then the quality assurance system is counterproductive. Indeed if the quality assurance system imposes too many restrictions, the system is overburdened, and the risk is high that the rules are bent by the operators and practitioners.

There is a trade-off to be made, and a compromise to reach, between strong rules and light rules. The strong rules, described in particular in the forthcoming guidelines, will be almost certainly and immediately bypassed. The light rules may not be enough to ensure the desired level of quality. The decision about the desired level of quality and the rules to set in motion rests with the RPL body in the country, and this Report aims at providing guidance – i.e., possible options – for doing so. The point is that too strict rules will be more systematically circumvented.

It may be believed that strict rules would guarantee better quality, but strict rules come with several drawbacks:

- Fewer organisations – i.e., RPL providers – will be licensed or/and accredited because fewer will apply as some will self-select themselves out, or/and because fewer organisations will meet the criteria listed under strict rules.
- Strict rules inevitably lead to higher risks of bypassing the rules and, in the end, delivering less quality. This is because it is worth the effort to invest energy in finding ways to bypass the rules when the rules are so strict that the potential gain – in administrative burden for instance and therefore cost – is high. Conversely, when the rules are light, investing energy in trying to bypass them is not worth the effort.

All in all, strict rules may well lead to lower quality than light rules because the light rules are fully implemented whereas stricter rules are more likely to be partly bypassed. Another advantage of light rules is that they are less difficult to enforce because selected RPL operators are more inclined to follow them in full. Strict rules are costly because enforcement costs are higher, and enforcement is more necessary. As a consequence, the cost of controlling whether the rules are adequately applied is the case of lower rather than stricter rules.

A specific objective of the proposed quality assurance system that RPL practitioners are first and foremost in charge to implement is therefore to strike a balance between establishing a good level of quality assurance without undue restrictions on RPL stakeholders, including RPL system managers, individual applicants, and assessors. For example, if all RPL assessors are required to have a PhD in a RPL related topic, and thirty years of experience in the field of assessment in the relevant industry, there is little chance that assessors are available any time soon. Another example is drawn from reality: some countries require that, in order to apply for a given qualification through RPL, the applicant must already possess a qualification at the level immediately below<sup>1</sup>, which prevents access to many potential applicants who may well have the master's level without possessing a bachelor's degree, and this is a loss of talent for the country. It is also contrary to the mere idea of RPL that says that whoever has the learning outcomes corresponding to a given qualification should be awarded this qualification after a proper assessment, no matter what.

### **2.2.6. Quality Assurance is not only about Monitoring and Evaluation**

Contrary to customary belief, quality assurance on the one hand and monitoring and evaluation on the other hand are different concepts. Monitoring and evaluation make it possible to collect data (monitoring) and deduce elements in terms of the implementation of the action (generally in terms of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability, and impact; OECD-DAC<sup>2</sup>, 1991 and 2019). This is evaluation, and evaluation needs data. In other words, monitoring and evaluation are used to control quality, but they are different concepts. They do not create quality, for instance, if the lessons learnt from monitoring and evaluation are not used to feed back into the RPL system.

---

<sup>1</sup> E.g., in order to apply for a master's degree through RPL, applicants must already possess a bachelor's degree.

<sup>2</sup> Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Quality assurance indeed refers to what needs to be implemented to ensure that RPL applicants' learning outcomes are identified, validated and recognised at the level of accuracy that the country sets for itself.

For example, assessors in the RPL at such and such level need to have such and such experience and such and such qualifications. Still for example, there should be a professional of the field, a teacher/trainer in the field, and a RPL expert in the panel of assessors; or the guidance officer cannot be among the assessors. All these conditions for quality assurance are usually tested during the pilot phase, and they have to be spelled or in the preparation of it.

Monitoring and evaluation are therefore necessary to confirm that the RPL system and its process are in place to ensure that the RPL system meets the expected quality norms.

### **2.2.7. Quality Assurance is not only about Developing Guidelines**

Another confusion is the difference between guidelines and quality assurance. Developing guidelines is part of the procedures to achieve a high level of quality, but it is not enough. There must be procedures on the ground to ensure this quality, i.e., procedures to ensure that what the guidelines say is applied on the ground, in reality.

The guidelines allow RPL stakeholders – and operators in the first place – to understand what RPL is, and how to do it at the expected level of quality, but just developing guidelines will not achieve a high level of quality. It is essential also for RPL practitioners.

For example, guidelines usually explain how assessors should be hired and/or trained. They give criteria (for example, qualification level of the assessors, knowledge of the subject, experience). If these criteria are not met, quality cannot be guaranteed. Similarly, guidelines usually specify how applicants will be assessed (e.g., procedures, qualification standards). Again, the objective is that that the assessment method is actually implemented, and used identically throughout the country, for example, and/or by all assessors.

### **2.2.8. General Aim and Specific Objectives of Quality Assurance in RPL**

At this stage of the document, it is useful to take stock of the above statements, comments and suggestions and to check where they lead the African countries in practical terms regarding what is to be done for organising the quality assurance system in RPL and developing capacity building activities for RPL practitioners.

#### ***General Aim of Quality Assurance in RPL***

The general aim is to equip the country with an RPL system that deliver a high level of quality. Quality assurance in the context of RPL is to ensure that:

- The successful RPL applicants (“RPL graduates” for short) do possess the learning outcomes they claim they possess, however and wherever acquired.
- The failed RPL applicants do not possess the learning outcome corresponding to the qualification they were aiming for.

The first part of the aim is accepted everywhere in the context of RPL. The second is systematically forgotten, and it is important for any country, aiming at being convincing about its RPL system, to ensure that both aspects of this general aim are true.

This general aim can be broken down in several specific objectives.

### *Specific Objectives of Quality Assurance in RPL*

The specific objectives are:

- ✓ Elaborating rules of selection, and monitoring, of the RPL operators.
- ✓ Deciding on the right level of rules, midway between strict and light rules.
- ✓ Building a digital platform for applying, for the guidance process and perhaps, if appropriate, for some elements of the assessment (especially in the case of collective assessment).
- ✓ Organising the decision-making process for the RPL Body to make key decisions, especially regarding the sequential process from licensing (input based) to accreditation (outcome based with some elements of the licensing process regarding the RPL process), and regarding the role of the digital platform.
- ✓ Elaborating guidelines for RPL operators (detailed rules, and explanations), and disseminating those rules among RPL practitioners.
- ✓ Identifying and selecting potential RPL operators.
- ✓ Enforcing the rules.
- ✓ Hiring RPL practitioners and building capacity.

### *Digital Platform – A Suitable Option*

Establishing a digital platform lies between the general aim and the specific objectives. It cannot be the general aim for quality assurance in RPL, but it is more than a specific objective. Digitalising the RPL system, or part of it, offers several opportunities:

- ✓ It will speed up the process, at least when it comes to initial information, to registration and to some other stages of the RPL process (e.g., information about the next assessment session).
- ✓ It will help centralising the process and collect the same data for all potential and actual RPL applicants, for managing the assessment and also for research purposes.
- ✓ It will help applicants to create, verify and modify their profile.
- ✓ It will help potential applicants in remote area to benefit from an access to the same information.
- ✓ It will allow to organise some pre-assessment, for instance for eligibility (the right to become an RPL applicant).
- ✓ It could allow collecting the fees for enrolling in the RPL process and deliver all the official proof of payment.
- ✓ It will allow to keep a record of the entire process and its outcomes (awarding of a qualification, or not; and appeal procedure).

- ✓ It will bring neutrality and therefore fairness to the RPL assessment for an objective assessment.
- ✓ It will bring transparency, comparability and trust which enhances the reputation of the RPL system.
- ✓ Promoting transparency, Comparability and trust in qualifications offered
- ✓ It will connect/ integrate all the digital platforms of all institution that operate in the field of RPL under the auspices of the RPL Body. It will help consolidate the data and therefore help improving the governance of the RPL system.
- ✓ In the long term, the digital platform will allow to organise the written assessments, if any (e.g., if higher education establishes an RPL system), and adapt them to each of the applicants (e.g., level, sectors, qualification aimed).
- ✓ In the long term, the digital platform will allow to organise the written assessments, if any (e.g., if higher education establishes an RPL system), and adapt them to each of the applicants (e.g., level, sectors, qualification aimed).
- ✓ Still in the long-term, the digital platform may help in distributing subsidies to RPL applicants that qualify for subsidies. Options are provided by lifelong learning subsidies, or individual learning accounts.
- ✓ A digital platform may be the place to buy top-training for those RPL applicants that failed the first time, but that failed so short of meeting all the criteria in the qualification standards that a few modules would help them succeed the second time.
- ✓ A digital platform may also be the place for employers to be informed about the content of a specific qualification achieved through RPL. Qualifications could be issued with a QR-code that would directly link to the qualifications database associated with the digital platform.

However, a digital platform should never be the only option for RPL applicants, as some of them may be digitally illiterate, or even illiterate in the language of the assessment.

### *Quality Assurance in Practice – Options for Issuing Rules and Prefiguring the Guidelines for RPL Operators*

In order to ensure the credibility, consistency and reliability of the RPL system, it is important to have adequate quality assurance at all stages of the RPL process; again accepting that RPL is assessment, and therefore that this includes all the stages identified, including guidance typically. The quality assurance aspects of each stage of the RPL process should be integrated into the RPL guidelines. These aspects relate to communication, guidance, advice, facilitation and support, strictly speaking assessment (modalities), capacity building and recruitment of RPL practitioners (e.g., guidance officers and assessors), as well as monitoring and evaluation professionals.

## 2.2.9. Licensing or Accreditation

### *Licensing*

The quality assurance set in motion by a country could be input-based or outcome-based. If the country opts for an input-based system, an institution can qualify as an RPL centre if it meets the following broad criteria, with no particular order:

- ✓ The premises of the institution must be modern and adapted to the reception of RPL applicants.
- ✓ If the institution has several buildings/addresses, the application must clearly state where exactly the RPL applicants will be received and then assessed in practice.
- ✓ The institution must have an appropriate staff in terms of quantity and quality; and experience may replace qualification.
- ✓ The institution appoints one of its staff to be the RPL referent in the institution, and in particular the contact point for the RPL Body to obtain information regarding RPL in the institution.
- ✓ All staff involved in the RPL system must follow and receive appropriate training and ongoing professional development for the functions they perform, with regular update.
- ✓ The institution must have a proven track history in assessing learning outcomes against predefined standards. Experience in delivering education and/or training may complement a too light experience in assessment, but it cannot not replace it.
- ✓ The institution must have a proven track history in providing guidance to individual learners.
- ✓ The institution commits to only providing guidance without forcing any potential applicant in any RPL process. The final decision to apply rests with the individual, after a phase of information, guidance and advice of good quality. All this is transparent and made public.
- ✓ The institution must clearly designate a physical place – an office, a booth – for potential applicants to seek initial information.
- ✓ The website of the institution must clearly inform about RPL, the opportunities it provides, and the way to apply in a clear and accessible way (e.g., plain language, no jargon).
- ✓ The institution must name a referent in the field of psychology with reference or a qualification in career guidance (i.e., school, and occupational guidance). The referent does not need to be a member of the staff but must be available on short notice (less than a week under normal circumstances, outside of festive seasons for example).
- ✓ The institution is able to spell out – in clear, concise and meaningful terms – how it will carry out the different stages of the RPL process, especially regarding guidance, preparation for assessment and actual assessment. In particular, it must be able to explain the tools it will use and provide to its assessors (e.g., manual, a checklist that includes a clear set of criteria for assessment, a handbook about work ethics).

- ✓ In particular, the institution must be able to demonstrate that it will organise the assessment process so that: it assesses learning outcomes, and not just the duration of the experience; it proposes a transparent, valid, reliable, fair, and authentic assessment; it recognises learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings as of equal value to learning outcomes acquired in formal settings; it always explain the decisions of the assessors; it involves a formal assessment of summative complaints (appeal); it proposes alternatives to failed applicants, such as additional learning, so that they meet the qualification standards the next time they apply for a qualification through RPL.
- ✓ The institution should clearly communicate about the schedules for assessment. It must be transparent about whether assessment is organised all year around or during assessment sessions a couple of times per year. In the latter case, dates must be published well ahead of time (6 months).
- ✓ Assessment processes should be monitored, revised, evaluated, and reviewed regularly as necessary to reflect changes in the needs being met, the purposes being met, and the state of the art of assessment.
- ✓ The institution must be familiar with learning outcomes-based curriculum (as opposed to input-based curriculum), so that the RPL is germane to their overall approach to teaching and learning.
- ✓ The institution must be familiar with the concept of micro-credentials, so that they are ready to award them if the country decides to follow this track.
- ✓ The institution must be in a position to deliver top-up training at reasonable cost, directly or through the partnership they may have with other institutions, for failed RPL applicants who are close to meeting the qualification standard and deserve a second chance in the short-term; without the failed applicant having to enrol for a full programme.
- ✓ The institution must commit to the fact that RPL assessment will be based on the qualification standards for the aimed qualification (already existing or developed for the RPL system).
- ✓ The institution must commit that it will not organise RPL processes for other qualifications than the qualifications for which it has obtained the right to operate RPL from the RPL Body (the regulator).
- ✓ The institution is aware of self-evaluation and is able to organise it on a regular basis to learn from its practice and improve its RPL process. The institution may name an independent external evaluator to assist this process.
- ✓ The institution must be able to demonstrate in written that it is applicant-centred, fair, respectful of the privacy of individual applicants, able to take into account equality and diversity issues, accessible (for applicants with disabilities), flexible.
- ✓ The institution has a relevant network of enterprises, especially in the industry sectors for which it has received delegation from the RPL Body to operate RPL.

- ✓ The institution has always complied with any statutory legislation.
- ✓ The institution must make a clear case about its intention to apply the guidelines that will be provided to it. It must commit to regularly request and obtain the revised guidelines (schedule to be provided); and apply the new guidelines whenever a new version is issued.
- ✓ The institution must clarify its intention to merge the quality assurance processes for RPL into the quality assurance processes of the institution (after scaling up).
- ✓ An internal process sometimes referred to as "moderation" or "verification" (in essence, a second verification of decisions made) must ensure that any assessment is fair and consistent and that what has been awarded is fair and comparable to what has been granted in similar situations. This process can be random – e.g., one in ten, or more – to minimise expenses and administrative burden.
- ✓ The guidance officers cannot be assessors, and assessors cannot be guidance officers, because the assessment must be completely neutral. If the applicant and assessor know each other, the assessment process cannot be neutral.
- ✓ Maintain a database on anonymous RPL applications and final decisions in terms of qualification granted to RPL applicants in order to compare similar applications to ensure consistency. This database must use a format provided by the RPL Body so that the consistency of RPL decisions can be checked across the country and over time.
- ✓ The institution commits to immediately report to the RPL Body in case of fraud, or any other misbehaviour.
- ✓ The policies, procedures, and criteria applied to the RPL assessment, including the disposition for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process, especially on the institution website.

This is a non-comprehensive list based on extensive fieldwork in many countries. It is intended to guide the RPL Body in its decision-making process. This list should be seen as a menu from which to select what is suitable in the country context.

### **Accreditation**

If the country opts for an outcome-based (accreditation) system, the criteria for the applicant institutions could be:

- The institution collects socioeconomic data regarding the RPL applicants while they are in the RPL process.
- The institution collects data regarding the position of the RPL former applicants in the labour market from the end of the RPL process until 18 months after it.
- The exact criteria will be provided in the guidelines and will be most probably different according to the industry, the education sector, the region and the level of qualification but what will matter will be the differential between the treatment group (RPL graduates) and the control group (unsuccessful RPL applicants). The key decision regarding these should be made by the RPL Body (the regulator) according to contextual pieces of information.



### **2.2.10. Recommendations – Licensing and then Accreditation**

The following recommendations may help the country to organise its decision-making process:

- There should be some flexibility in the way applicant institutions organise the full assessment process from initial information to the ceremony. What matters again is the qualification standards that are used and should be provided to the operators by the RPL Body, but the assessment process itself should be flexible because it has to vary with the level of qualification, the industry and the education sector.
- The input-based (licensing) approach is recommended for first-time applicants.
- A hybrid approach is recommended from first renewal on. It would consist of the outcomes-based approach, based on the performance of RPL applicants in relation to the qualification they have achieved, complemented by some elements of the licensing process.
- These elements, from the licensing initial process, should be selected in coordination with the RPL Body and the Ministry in charge. Nevertheless, the recommendation is that key elements of the process, such as the way the guidance is delivered, is kept.

### **2.2.11. Further recommendations**

Selected operators should be strongly advised to become acquainted with quality assurance. They should be invited to explain in their application to explain how they plan to implement a quality assurance whereby the following questions are addressed:

- Do we do what we have to do? This is, for example, what the law or national policy imposes on all institutions operating RPL.
- Are we doing what we plan to do? Has the strategy been implemented?
- Do we make it work well? This refers to quality standards.
- What is planned to verify that it works well (e.g., indicators)? In case not, is there a possible remediation?
- What is planned for continuous improvement?
- If the RPL operator organises self-evaluation, it will have evidence about what works and what does not work. In addition, it is always possible to organise external evaluation, and this would provide an opportunity to confront the evaluation of an outsider with the view of the institution.

The quality assurance system allows to make explicit the expectations of the institution, here the RPL operator. It is also a tool for self-evaluation in relation to these expectations. In other words, a strong recommendation would be to incentivise RPL practitioners to open up to a quality assurance culture.

### 3. Education and Learning Theories Behind RPL

#### Box 2. Key Take Away Points of Section 3

This section provides a comprehensive understanding of the educational theories behind RPL and their practical implications and applications, equipping practitioners with the knowledge behind recognition of prior learning:

**Lifelong Learning:** This section emphasises the principles of lifelong learning, highlighting the importance of continuous education and skills development throughout an individual's life. This section explains how RPL supports lifelong learning by validating and recognising all learning outcomes, including non-formal and informal learning ones.

**Constructivist Learning Theory:** It describes constructivist learning theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge through their experiences.

**Experiential Learning Theory:** It explains experiential learning theory, which also emphasises learning through experience.

**Situated Learning Theory:** It discusses situated learning theory, which asserts that learning occurs within a specific context and is often a social process.

**Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy):** It focuses on adult learning principles, also known as andragogy. This section highlights the unique characteristics of adult learners and how RPL can be tailored to meet their needs, recognising the knowledge and skills they have gained through life and work experiences.

**Transformative Learning Theory:** It explores transformative learning theory, which involves a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions.

**Equity and Social Justice:** It addresses issues of equity and social justice in learning. This section emphasises the role of RPL in promoting inclusivity and fairness, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their background, have access to formal recognition of their knowledge and skills.

**Human Capital Theory:** It discusses human capital theory, which views education and training as investments that enhance an individual's economic value. The section connects this theory to RPL by explaining how recognising prior learning outcomes can increase individuals' employability and economic opportunities.

**Practical Implications for RPL:** It links the theoretical foundations to practical applications in RPL. This section provides concrete examples of how the theories can be applied in assessing and recognising prior learning outcomes, offering guidance for RPL practitioners on implementing these concepts.

This whole Handbook proposes a basis for conducting the thinking process in the countries interested in building the capacities of their RPL practitioners. It is about RPL in practice, and it is also about learning about RPL. It is therefore rather general in nature and rather broad in scope so that countries may decide of their main topics of interest and implement the propositions they see relevant for their country.

To that extent, it contains practical as well as theoretical elements. Now that the previous section has clearly established the nature of RPL, this section proposes a reflection on the conceptual underpinnings of RPL. In particular, this section proposes the possible connections between the education and learning theories and RPL.

### 3.1. Theoretical Foundations and Links to RPL



The theoretical underpinnings of RPL may be tracked in several educational and learning theories. These theories identify the different ways in which individuals acquire knowledge and skills. They allow to easily connect with RPL to the extent that they propose that learning occurs in all kinds of contexts, not only in formal (exemplified by school, universities, or VET centres), but also non-formal and informal (exemplified by the workplace, the private sphere or volunteering activities) ones. They clearly state that experiences gained at the workplace, in the community, in family and in personal life in general has the potential to lead to learning outcomes. The beauty of RPL comes, among others, from the fact that it recognises that individuals learn everywhere and all the time, and that the corresponding learning outcomes should be given currency, in the labour market and in life in general. This Handbook is about giving currency to these learning outcomes in general, and therefore on how to make them visible and to assess and recognise them.

The rest of this Section in particular is an attempt at identifying the most useful concepts for introducing RPL, and their links to existing education and learning theories. There are several schools of thought that clearly point to RPL one way or another. RPL is the natural offspring of these pioneering concepts and theories.

#### 3.1.1. Lifelong Learning



Lifelong learning is at the heart of modern approaches to analysing and promoting individual investment into acquiring knowledge and skills. It is a concept that emphasises the continuous character of learning throughout life (Candy, 1991). Faure et al. Unesco report (1972) already contains most of the ideas that will later be gathered and developed under the term 'lifelong learning'. In particular, the introduction of the concept of life-wide learning and the recognition that learning may take place in informal contexts pave the way for RPL. Indeed Faure (1972) promotes integration whereby learning should be integrated into all aspects of life and not confined to formal learning contexts.

It is difficult to trace back the origin of lifelong learning with certainty. Nevertheless, Yeaxlee (1929) represents an interesting early and rather comprehensive approach to the concept of lifelong learning, and its implication for education. He emphasised the need for continuous education throughout life and the importance of integrating education – learning – into all aspects of life.

Another significant early contribution is Lindeman's (1926). It is viewed as a foundational work in the field of adult education, emphasising the importance of experiential learning and the role of adult education in personal and social development. Lindeman (1926) argues for the value of adult education and lifelong learning, stressing that education should be a lifelong process and should be more connected to the real-life experiences of adults.

These early works paved the way for later developments in the field, including the Faure Report of 1972, which further advanced the idea of lifelong learning as a fundamental principle of education policy and practice, later developed by Unesco again (Delors, 1996) or by the OECD (1996). Lifelong learning recognises that education is not confined to childhood or the classroom but extends across all stages of life and in various contexts, whether formal or not; not formal being non-formal or informal.

Therefore, RPL is inherently linked to the principles of lifelong learning. Indeed, by providing a mechanism for assessing, validating and recognising learning outcomes that occur outside of formal learning contexts, RPL supports the idea that learning is a continuous process. It validates the continuous acquisition of knowledge and skills, regardless of when, where, or how it occurs (Candy, 1991).

One of the key aspects of lifelong learning, which is relevant to RPL as a policy tool, is its flexibility because, as seen above, learning can take place in different contexts. In theory – some countries have restricted approaches – RPL reflects this flexibility by validating and recognising learning outcomes from a wide range of experiences.

Lifelong learning also connects to RPL in the sense that it emphasises the importance of personal and professional growth. RPL supports this by providing individuals with the opportunity to gain formal recognition for all their learning outcomes through a qualification or, among others, credits toward a qualification, exemptions for access to formal education and training, shortening of a curriculum. In turn, the outcome of RPL for successful applicants – typically a qualification – can enhance their career prospects and personal development. In addition, by validating prior learning outcomes, RPL can reduce the time and cost required to obtain qualifications, making it easier for individuals to engage in actual lifelong learning.

Finally, lifelong learning promotes the idea that learning should be relevant and applicable to individual's life and goals. Given the way RPL processes are organised and implemented, RPL aligns with this principle by recognising learning outcomes that have relevance to an individual's project, personal or more often occupation project. It is also consistent with the fact that RPL is known as increasing the motivation and level of engagement in further learning, whether formal or not, and/or in the labour market, as individuals see more clearly the benefits they reap from knowledge and skills.

Lifelong learning and RPL have common foundations because they are comprehensive and inclusive in essence and recognise the value of learning everywhere and all the time throughout life. They both promote the permanent acquisition of knowledge and skills. They both validate the diverse ways in which individuals learn throughout their lives, promoting personal and professional growth and fostering a culture of continuous learning.

### 3.1.2. Constructivist Theory



Constructivist theory, advanced by educational theorists such as Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1978), advance that learners construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiences and reflections on those experiences. It emphasises that learning is an active, contextualised process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it.

This is relevant to RPL because constructivist principles are central to recognising that individuals build knowledge and skills through diverse experiences. Unlike traditional education, which often focuses on the transmission of fixed bodies of knowledge from teacher to student, RPL acknowledges that learning can occur in varied settings and through different modalities. This approach validates that each individual has a unique learning pathway. RPL is based on grounds relevant to the constructivist hypothesis that knowledge is constructed through personal and social contexts.

Piaget's focus on developmental stages and Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction and the Zone of Proximal Development<sup>1</sup> highlight the importance of context and social engagement in learning (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). In the RPL process, this translates into recognising learning that occurs in social and cultural contexts, such as workplace learning, community service, or family responsibilities. These experiences provide rich, contextualised learning that is highly relevant to an individual's life and work. All RPL processes involve active engagement from applicants, requiring them to reflect on their experiences and articulate their learning outcomes in a structured format. This aligns with the constructivist view that learners actively construct knowledge. For instance,

---

<sup>1</sup> The Zone of Proximal Development is the zone between what learners can do without assistance and what they can do with guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

compiling documents<sup>1</sup> for substantiating learning outcomes – a.k.a. portfolio of competences – for the RPL assessors is a constructivist activity, as it involves identifying relevant experiences, reflecting on what was learned, and demonstrating how this learning meets specific criteria or outcomes. Relevant portfolios of competences are those that go beyond a simple passive collection of pieces of evidence such as labour contract or attendance certificates. Finally, the social aspect of constructivist theory is reflected in RPL's recognition of collaborative learning. Learning that occurs through interaction with peers, mentors, and colleagues is valued and validated in the RPL approach, mostly because it boosts the quality of the learning outcomes and helps creating transversal and transferable skills (e.g., teamwork). This recognition supports the idea that knowledge is co-constructed through social processes and interactions.

RPL relies on some constructivist principles because it provides a flexible and inclusive approach to recognising learning outcomes. It validates the diverse and individualised ways in which people acquire knowledge and skills, supporting lifelong learning and personal and professional development.

### 3.1.3. Experiential Learning Theory



Among the different approaches to constructivism, Experiential Learning Theory is particularly relevant for providing theoretical underpin to RPL. Experiential Learning Theory hypothesises that learning is a dynamic process where knowledge and skills are created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). The model is a sort of cycle that includes four distinct stages:

- Concrete experience,
- Reflective observation,
- Abstract conceptualisation, and
- Active experimentation.

This cyclical process stresses the importance of reflecting on experiences. They allow to form ideas and theories, which can be tested in new context, therefore continually refining one's understanding and skills.

In the context of RPL, Experiential Learning Theory is therefore particularly relevant because it acknowledges that significant learning occurs outside formal learning contexts. Individuals acquire valuable knowledge and skills through experiences, which most often are taking place at the workplace, in the community, and/or the in the private sphere (Kolb, 1984). Experiential Learning Theory and RPL coincide to recognise the value of these experiences for the former, and the value of the corresponding learning outcomes for the latter. RPL is a natural extension of the Experiential Learning Theory since RPL the many different RPL processes are meant to validate this learning by recognising the learning outcomes coming from this practical knowledge and skills gained through experience.

The first stage of the Experiential Learning Theory, the concrete experience, involves engaging in a specific activity or event. For example, a professional may develop project management skills through years of managing projects at work. In the RPL process, this stage is recognised by documenting these practical experiences as evidence of learning.

The second stage, reflective observation, involves looking retrospectively at these experiences and analysing them. This is a crucial step in the RPL process, as individuals are often required to reflect on their past experiences, identifying the knowledge and skills they have gained and how they have

---

<sup>1</sup> Actual documents and also "sounds", "video", "pictures".

applied them in various contexts. Relevant portfolios of competences do stress this reflexive process as RPL applicants have to demonstrate that they have identified their learning outcomes and why they are critical to succeeding in the RPL process. Consequently, purely descriptive portfolios of competences are not suitable in the RPL process.

The third stage, abstract conceptualisation, involves building a general understanding of the matter at stake. This also a crucial step in the RPL process because it consists of identifying knowledge and skills gained from practical experience and their potential to correspond to formal learning outcomes, as described in qualifications or assessment standards typically. A fair fraction of the work of RPL applicants, during the RPL process, is to articulate all their learning outcomes – whether acquired in formal contexts or no – with the criteria required for formal qualifications, or similar outcomes (e.g., credits toward a qualification, exemptions for access, shortening of a curriculum).

The fourth and last stage of Experiential Learning Theory, active experimentation, involves applying these new knowledge and skills in new situations. Here again, this is consistent with the RPL approach that proceed with final assessment by asking RPL applicants to prove their knowledge and skills during a final assessment – oftentimes practical – such as observations at the workplace, simulations of a workplace, tests, interviews, case studies, or a mix of all these.

The Experiential Learning Theory is a natural applicant theory for providing a strong theoretical underpinning to the RPL approach because it proposes to consider any kind of learning activities, whether they are taking place in a formal context or not. It is not recommended to use the term “experiential learning” in this context because it may introduce some confusion. Indeed, it is not a characteristic of the learning approach that leads to RPL: several learning systems that are highly formal do contain a huge fraction of experiential learning, for example the dual apprenticeship system.

Nevertheless, the Experiential Learning Theory heavily and naturally reminds of RPL because they have in common the focus on all kinds of learning contexts, and on the importance of reflecting on and on documenting all learning outcomes. It provides a framework for understanding how learning outcomes acquired in all contexts, formal or not, may be formally assessed, validated and recognised, supporting individuals in achieving a qualification, or similar outcomes.

#### 3.1.4. Situated Learning Theory



Situated learning was developed by Lave and Wenger (1991). It is another important theory relevant to RPL. The theory emphasises that learning takes place in the same context in which it is applied. It also emphasises that it is deeply embedded in social and cultural activities, and it is clear by now that this is rather consensual.

Lave and Wenger posit that learning is inherently tied to the context and culture in which it occurs. Rather than viewing learning as the mere acquisition of abstract knowledge, situated learning emphasises participation in social practices and the community of practice. This theory underscores the importance of authentic contexts in learning processes, asserting that learning is a social process that occurs through participation in activities within specific communities. It is based on several key concepts:

- **Legitimate Peripheral Participation:** Lave and Wenger describe how newcomers to a community begin by participating in simple, low-risk tasks (peripheral participation) and gradually take on more complex and central tasks as they become more competent (legitimate participation). This process facilitates learning through increasing involvement in the community's practices.

- Communities of Practice: Groups of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis. These groups of individuals engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain. Members of a community of practice share resources, experiences, stories, and tools, enhancing their knowledge and skills through mutual engagement.
- Social Interaction: Learning is a social process that occurs through participation in social and cultural activities, rather than through the passive reception of abstract knowledge.

The connection to RPL is actual on different levels. It appears in relation to the fact that learning is contextualised. The Situated Learning Theory highlights the significance of context in the learning process. Learning is most effective when it takes place within the same context where it will be applied, hence the stress on work-based learning in many formal learning systems. RPL aligns with this by acknowledging the learning that occurs in real-world contexts, such as workplaces, community activities, and personal life experiences; and validating and recognising the corresponding learning outcomes. This recognition supports the idea that significant learning happens within authentic contexts rather than solely in formal education settings.

The connection to RPL is also clear in relation to social and cultural relevance. Lave and Wenger's emphasis on social interaction and cultural context in learning aligns well with the principles of RPL. RPL takes into account the various social and cultural dimensions of learning, recognising that learning experiences are shaped by the environments and communities in which they occur. By validating informal and non-formal learning that happens within different communities of practice, RPL respects and values diverse learning pathways.

Finally, RPL aligns with the Situated Learning Theory in relation to legitimate peripheral participation. This concept directly supports the RPL process since individuals often begin their learning journeys in peripheral roles, gradually moving to more central and responsible positions as they gain expertise. RPL recognises this progression by validating the learning outcomes acquired through various stages of involvement in professional or community practices, and at the end of this learning process. This gradual acquisition of knowledge and skills may be seen as a fundamental aspect of both situated learning and RPL.

In practice the Situated Learning Theory and RPL align with each other quite well when a portfolio of competences is used during the RPL assessment process since situated learning principles include portfolios and reflective narratives, i.e., collecting evidence of learning experiences and reflecting on how these experiences contribute to overall competence. There is also an interesting alignment between Situated Learning and RPL since peers and mentors are oftentimes involved in the RPL assessment process, and peers and mentors are found in what is described as the community of practice in the Situated Learning Theory. This is critical to the RPL assessment process as this is a way to guarantee contextually relevant assessment of the RPL applicant's learning outcomes.

Situated learning theory enriches the understanding of RPL by emphasising the importance of context, social interaction, and participation in communities of practice. It underscores that learning is a dynamic and social process, deeply rooted in practical experiences and cultural contexts. By validating and recognising these situated learning experiences, RPL fosters a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to acknowledging diverse learning pathways. By integrating these theoretical insights, RPL can be more effectively designed and implemented to support the diverse and dynamic nature of learning in real-world contexts.

### 3.1.5. Adult Learning Theory (Andragogy)



Knowles (1973) deals with what is a component, and a component only, of lifelong learning: adult learning, or andragogy. The term “andragogy” was actually coined by the German educator Alexander Kapp in 1833., who needed to describe the educational theory of the teaching of adults, contrasting it with pedagogy, which focuses on the education of children. The concept was later popularised and expanded by Malcolm Knowles (1973) who developed a theory of adult learning based on andragogical principles. His theory of adult learning emphasises that adults are self-directed learners with a wealth of experiences that they bring to the learning process. It is based on several key principles:

- Adults need to know why they need to learn,
- They are motivated to learn things that are immediately relevant to their occupational or personal lives,
- They bring a rich reservoir of experiences that serve as a resource for learning, and
- They are self-directed in their learning.

RPL aligns closely with these principles to the extent that it provides a framework for assessing, validating and recognising all learning outcomes, even those coming from experience in contexts that are not formal (non-formal and informal). The core principle of adult learning theory is that adults need to understand the relevance of what they are learning. And precisely, RPL processes help applicants to articulate and validate the relevance of their prior learning outcomes by mapping it to formal qualifications and clearly identified knowledge and skills. This relevance is demonstrated during the final assessment of the RPL process which has to be authentic. RPL assessors have to assess applicants in relation to the meaning of their learning outcomes and of their projects, whether occupational or personal.

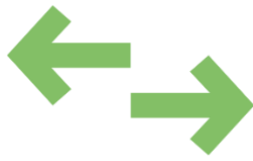
The concept of self-directed learning is central to both the adult learning theory and RPL. In RPL, individuals take responsibility for identifying, documenting, and reflecting on their prior learning outcomes. This process requires a high degree of self-direction and motivation, as learners must compile evidence, reflect on their experiences, and articulate how their learning outcomes meets specific criteria, oftentimes listed in qualification standards. This aligns with Knowles’ view that adult learners are self-directed and capable of managing their own learning processes (Knowles, 1973).

The adult learning theory also emphasises the importance of drawing on the rich experiences of adult learners. RPL explicitly values these experiences, recognising that learning occurs in a variety of contexts beyond formal education and training. All individual’s occupational experience, volunteer work, or personal projects can all be considered valid sources of learning. By validating the potential learning outcomes coming from these experiences, RPL acknowledges the value of the knowledge and skills adults have acquired throughout their lives. Finally, adult learning highlights that adults are motivated to learn in order to acquire knowledge and skills that have immediate relevance to their lives and work. RPL supports this by providing formal recognition of knowledge and skills that are directly applicable to an individual’s career or personal goals. This immediate relevance can enhance motivation and engagement, as individuals see the tangible benefits of having their learning validated and recognised.

By aligning with the principles of adult learning theory (andragogy), RPL provides a framework for validating and recognising the diverse and rich learning experiences of adult learners. It supports self-directed learning, values experiential knowledge, and enhances the relevance and applicability of learning in real-life contexts.



### 3.1.6. Transformative Learning Theory



Transformative Learning Theory, developed by Mezirow (1991), posits that transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. This type of learning often starts with a disorienting dilemma—an experience that challenges existing perspectives and prompts critical reflection.

RPL is closely aligned with the principles of transformative learning. One of the key aspects of transformative learning is indeed the critical reflection on assumptions and beliefs; and RPL processes often require individuals to engage in reflective practice, examining their past experiences and articulating what they have learned. This reflection is a critical component of RPL, as it helps individuals identify and articulate the knowledge and skills they have gained from their experiences.

Transformative learning involves a shift in perspective, leading to a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experiences. RPL supports this shift by validating and recognising significant learning that results from transformative experiences. For example, an individual who has undergone a major career change or who has developed new skills through challenging personal experiences can potentially have the corresponding learning outcomes formally recognised through RPL.

The concept of disorienting dilemmas in transformative learning aligns with RPL's recognition of experiential learning. Many individuals seeking RPL have had experiences that challenge their existing knowledge and skills, prompting them to learn and adapt. Any RPL process validates the corresponding learning outcomes by acknowledging the depth and impact of transformative experiences, providing formal recognition for the newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Transformative learning also emphasises the importance of dialogue and discourse in the learning process. RPL often involves discussions with guidance officers and, first and foremost, RPL assessors to validate and reflect on learning experiences. This dialogue helps applicants articulate their learning outcomes and understand their relevance and applicability, supporting the transformative learning process.

### 3.1.7. Equity and Social Justice



Equity and social justice are foundational concepts that emphasise the importance of ensuring equal access to educational and occupational opportunities and recognising the diverse forms of learning and cultural backgrounds individuals bring (Fraser, 1997). These principles are central to creating inclusive and fair societies where everyone has the opportunity to succeed.

RPL promotes equity and social justice by providing a mechanism for validating and recognising learning outcomes acquired outside traditional learning contexts. This recognition is particularly important for individuals from marginalised or underrepresented groups who may not have had access to formal education, or not long enough. By acknowledging the value of diverse learning experiences and giving currency to all learning outcomes, RPL helps providing equal opportunities to all individuals in order to gain credentials and improve their socioeconomic status.

One of the core principles of equity is the recognition of diversity. RPL supports this principle by valuing the unique experiences and learning pathways of individuals. For example, someone who has developed leadership skills through community involvement or family responsibilities can have these skills formally recognised through RPL. This validation acknowledges the rich and diverse forms of learning that occur in different cultural and social contexts.

Inclusion is another key aspect of equity and social justice. RPL promotes inclusive practices by recognising the learning outcomes of individuals who may have been excluded from traditional educational pathways. This includes recognising the knowledge and skills of workers in informal or non-traditional employment sectors, validating the learning outcomes of immigrants and refugees, and acknowledging the learning of individuals with disabilities.

By providing formal recognition to all experiential learning outcomes, RPL enhances the visibility and value of diverse forms of knowledge and skills. This recognition supports social justice by validating the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their background or circumstances. It empowers individuals by enhancing their self-esteem and confidence, providing them with the credentials needed to access further education, training, and employment opportunities.

RPL is the most inclusive approach that can be found in the field of lifelong learning. Its alignment with equity and social justice principles helps to create a more inclusive and fair society. It recognises and values the diverse learning experiences of individuals, promoting equal access to educational and occupational opportunities and supporting social mobility and individual agency.



### **3.1.8. Human Capital Theory**

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which views education and training as investments in human capital that enhance an individual's productivity and economic value, provides a useful framework for understanding the economic implications of RPL. It is not the most convincing theory to talk about education and training in general, but it has some normative value for thinking about RPL from an economic point of view. According to Becker (1993), knowledge and skills increase an individual's value in the labour market, contributing to economic growth and productivity.

RPL supports Human Capital Theory by providing formal recognition for knowledge and skills acquired through experience whatever the context, formal or not. This recognition enhances individuals' employability and economic potential, as they can gain qualifications that validate all their learning outcomes.

The concept of investment in education is central to Human Capital Theory. It can be extended without loss of generality to investment in learning. By validating and recognising all prior learning outcomes, RPL encourages individuals to invest in their own knowledge and skills. This investment can take any form, including self-learning and all kinds of non-formal and informal learning. By reducing the time and cost required to obtain qualifications or similar outcomes, RPL makes it easier for individuals to continue investing in their personal and professional development by bridging non-formal and informal learning and formal education and training.

Workforce development is another key aspect of Human Capital Theory. RPL supports the development of a skilled workforce by validating and recognising all learning outcomes of individuals. This recognition can help employers identify and utilise the knowledge and skills of their employees more effectively, enhancing productivity and innovation. Employer may an RPL approach to assess the knowledge and skills of their employees and identify areas for further training and development, and/or organise better job matching.

Finally, the Human Capital Theory identifies generic and specific human capital. The former can be acquired in many learning contexts – including formal, in the education and training system typically – and is valued by all enterprises. It is transferable and enterprises are unlikely to pay for the acquisition of such human capital by their employees. On the contrary, specific human capital is useful only to a small number of enterprise and it is likely that it can be acquired only at the workplace, through non-formal and informal learning. RPL has the potential to put a name of the corresponding knowledge and skills and to make them visible. The distinction between generic and specific human

capital is not so relevant nowadays, but it provides an interesting theoretical underpinning to think about RPL as a process for making the labour market more fluid.

Overall, RPL enhances the economic value of knowledge and skills, and therefore contributes to the economic growth and productivity. It supports individuals in gaining the credentials needed to access better job opportunities, contributing to their economic well-being and reducing skills gaps in the labour market. The possible interpretation of RPL in relation to the Human Capital Theory highlights its economic benefits and its role in supporting workforce development.

### **3.2. Practical Implications and Applications for RPL of its Theoretical Underpinnings**



The idea of RPL is connected to various concepts and theories that emphasise the value of experiential, contextual, and lifelong learning. Understanding these theoretical underpinnings help building stronger rationales so that RPL can be more effectively implemented to validate diverse learning experiences, promote equity, support lifelong learning, and enhance economic opportunities. These theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how RPL supports personal and professional growth, fosters inclusive and equitable education, and contributes to economic development.

In addition, these theoretical underpinnings have practical implications and applications. By incorporating this theoretical knowledge into practical applications, RPL can also be more effectively implemented. Indeed implementing RPL involves translating theoretical insights into practical processes that can be applied in educational and occupational settings. Each theoretical underpinning has the potential to inform actual implementation.

#### **3.2.1. RPL Promotes Lifelong Learning**

RPL encourages resumption or continuation of learning by validating informal and non-formal learning outcomes because:

- Individuals acquire self-esteem,
- Individuals acquire confidence,
- Individuals do not have to learn again what they already know,
- Individuals see the potential in additional learning,
- Individuals realise it is not true that additional learning and higher qualifications, including learning in higher education institutions, is not for them,
- All other stakeholders realise the potential for individuals and contribute to implement lifelong learning systems,
- Flexible learning pathways is conducive to RPL because multiple entry and exit points in educational programmes allow to organise top-up learning activities.

RPL is a component of lifelong learning and also a strong promoter of lifelong learning.

#### **3.2.2. Constructivist Theory**

Collaborative learning should be promoted because:

- Group projects, peer reviews, and discussions validate social learning and knowledge construction.
- Contextual assessments, i.e., assessments embedded in real-life scenarios, like observation and simulations, allow learners to demonstrate practical knowledge and skills.

### **3.2.3. Experiential Learning Theory**

Experiential Learning Theory has implications for RPL because the following should be part of the RPL process:

- Portfolios of competences: RPL applicants must be asked to document experiences, reflections, and applied knowledge. This includes work samples, project reports, and reflective journals.
- Reflective Practice: Structured reflective activities help RPL applicants critically analyse their experiences and link them to knowledge and building additional skills.

### **3.2.4. Situated Learning Theory**

Situated Learning Theory has implications for RPL because the following should be part of the RPL process:

- Community of Practice: Involving peers and mentors in the RPL assessment process to validate learning within authentic contexts.
- Contextual Learning Activities: Designing activities situated in learners' work or community environments, such as on-the-job assessments.

### **3.2.5. Adult Learning Theory**

Adult Learning Theory has implications for RPL because the following should be part of the RPL process:

- Self-Assessment Tools: Using tools that enable RPL applicants to assess their own learning outcomes and identify areas for growth.
- Relevance and Context: Customizing RPL processes to align with learners' personal and professional goals.

### **3.2.6. Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformative Learning Theory has implications for RPL because the following should be part of the RPL process:

- Critical Reflection: Activities that encourage learners to reflect on their experiences and transform their perspectives.
- Dialogic Processes: Facilitating discussions and mentoring sessions to foster deeper understanding.

### **3.2.7. Equity and Social Justice**

Equity and social justice have implications for RPL because the following should be part of the RPL process:

- Inclusive Practices: Developing policies that recognise diverse learning experiences and ensure equitable assessment criteria.
- Accessibility: Providing support services to ensure all learners, including marginalised groups, have access to RPL.

### 3.2.8. Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory has implications for RPL because the following should be part of the RPL process:

- Alignment with Industry Standards: Ensuring RPL assessments match job requirements and industry standards when RPL is truly labour market and employability oriented.
- Economic Incentives: Offering financial incentives and employer recognition programmes to encourage participation in RPL.

### 3.3. Conclusion

The theoretical underpinnings mobilised show that RPL allows for more personalised and flexible learning pathways because:

- There are no initial conditions, especially not in relation to socioeconomic status of the parents/family, to enter the RPL process,
- RPL acknowledges the value of all backgrounds and experiences of learners,
- RPL is fully inclusive.

RPL is also a strong promoter of equity of access for all because RPL improves access to education and qualifications for individuals who may not have had the opportunity to engage in formal education, or not long enough.

Overall, this section meant to provide the potential theoretical underpinnings of RPL because implementing RPL involves translating theoretical insights into practical processes.

## 4. How to Do RPL

### Box 3. Key Take Away Points of Section 4

This Section highlights the comprehensive guidelines and best practices that RPL practitioners should follow to ensure an effective, fair, and inclusive RPL process:

**Rules for RPL Practitioners:** This section outlines the principles and guidelines that RPL practitioners must follow to ensure a fair, transparent, and effective RPL process. It emphasises the importance of features described in the rest of the section such as: initial guidance, personalised approaches, fairness, privacy, inclusivity, accessibility, and flexibility in the RPL process.

**Guidance Should Be Provided to Individuals and Potential RPL Applicants:** Practitioners should offer clear and comprehensive guidance to individuals interested in RPL, ensuring they understand the process, benefits, and requirements. This helps in making informed decisions and prepares them for the assessment.

**RPL Should Be Applicant-centred:** The RPL process should be tailored to the needs and circumstances of each applicant, recognising their unique learning experiences and providing personalised support throughout the process.

**RPL Assessment Should Be Fair:** Fairness in assessment is crucial. Practitioners must ensure that all assessments are conducted objectively and consistently, using valid and reliable methods to evaluate the applicant's learning outcomes.

**Respect the Privacy of the Applicant:** Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of applicants is essential. Practitioners must handle all personal information and evidence provided by applicants with the utmost care and security.

**Take Into Account Equality, Inclusiveness, and Diversity Issues:** RPL processes should promote equality and inclusiveness, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to have their prior learning outcomes validated and recognised.

**RPL Should Be Accessible and Flexible:** The RPL process must be designed to be accessible and flexible, accommodating the diverse needs and schedules of applicants. This includes offering different modes of assessment and support.

**Assess Learning Outcomes and Not Just the Duration of the Experience:** The focus of RPL assessment should be on the learning outcomes achieved rather than the time spent in acquiring those outcomes. This ensures that the assessment accurately reflects the applicant's learning outcomes.

**Propose a Transparent, Valid, Reliable, Fair, and Authentic Assessment:** The assessment methods and criteria should be transparent, ensuring that applicants understand what is being assessed and how. The assessment should be valid, reliable, fair, and authentic, reflecting the true learning outcomes of the applicants.

**Examples of Good Practice in the Field of Quality Assurance:** This section provides examples of good practices in maintaining quality assurance within the RPL process. It offers insights into successful strategies and methods used in various contexts to ensure that RPL assessments are fair, reliable, and valid, enhancing the overall credibility and effectiveness of the RPL system.

RPL should be linked to Occupational Standards and the NQFs to ensure quality and relevance of the qualifications awarded.

Guidelines could be established on the basis of the approach to quality assurance described in Section 2. This work should be done in consultation with RPL stakeholders. This is a necessary condition for the relevance of the guidelines, and the only simple way to ensure that they are actually implemented by the practitioners involved in the RPL system, rather than regarded as imposed from outside. It is indeed necessary to create a sense of ownership among stakeholders.

#### **4.1. Rules for RPL practitioners**

Nevertheless, and that is the role of this Handbook, this Section suggests a possible list of rules that are worth considering when organising the discussion among stakeholders for elaborating the guidelines and designing an RPL system.

##### **4.1.1. Guidance Should be Provided to Individuals and Potential RPL Applicants**

Practitioners should provide clear and comprehensive information to applicants about the RPL process, supporting individuals in understanding how their prior learning outcomes can be assessed, validated and recognised. This guidance includes helping potential applicants identify and articulate their relevant experiences and learning, ensuring they are aware of the potential outcomes and benefits of RPL. It is important to assist individuals in gathering the necessary documentation and evidence for their applications, offering advice on how to present their prior learning outcomes effectively.

Practitioners need to help applicants understand the criteria against which their learning outcomes will be assessed, providing support in preparing for any assessments or interviews. Encouraging applicants to reflect on their learning and development needs, continuous support and feedback should be available throughout the RPL process.

Guidance officers should never be involved in the final assessment.

##### **4.1.2. RPL Should Be Individual/applicant-centred**

RPL practitioners must prioritise the needs and circumstances of each individual applicant, adopting a personalised approach to support each applicant's unique learning journey. They need to be flexible and responsive to the diverse backgrounds of applicants, ensuring that the RPL process is inclusive and accessible to all individuals.

Practitioners should actively listen to applicants' experiences and aspirations, respecting and valuing the diverse ways in which individuals have gained their knowledge and skills. The assessment methods should be adapted to suit the individual circumstances of each applicant, providing encouragement and motivation tailored to each applicant.

Practitioners need to build a trusting and supportive relationship with applicants, ensuring that they feel valued and respected throughout the process.

##### **4.1.3. RPL Assessment Should Be fair**

RPL practitioners must apply consistent and objective criteria to all assessments, ensuring transparency in the assessment process to maintain fairness. They need to avoid any biases or prejudices that could affect their judgment, treating all applicants with equality and impartiality.

Practitioners should provide equal opportunities for all individuals to demonstrate their learning outcomes, ensuring that the RPL process does not disadvantage any applicant. Fairness involves providing clear and constructive feedback to all applicants, with practitioners being accountable for their decisions and open to scrutiny. Ensuring that the appeals process, if any, is accessible and fair, practitioners must continuously review and improve their practices to maintain fairness.

#### **4.1.4. Respect the Privacy of the Individual/applicant**

Practitioners must adhere to data protection laws and regulations regarding applicants' information, ensuring that all personal data is stored securely and accessed only by authorised personnel. They need to inform applicants about how their data will be used and protected, obtaining explicit consent from applicants before sharing their information. Practitioners should ensure that applicants' information is kept confidential at all times, handling all documentation and evidence with the utmost care.

They need to respect applicants' right to privacy during interviews and assessments, ensuring that any discussions about applicants' learning and experiences are conducted privately. Practitioners should provide applicants with access to their own data upon request, ensuring transparency about privacy policies and practices.

#### **4.1.5. Take Into Account Equality, Inclusiveness and Diversity Issues**

Practitioners should be aware of and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds of applicants, ensuring that the RPL process is inclusive and accessible to all individuals. They need to actively promote equality and diversity in their practices, recognising and valuing the different ways in which individuals acquire learning outcomes.

Practitioners need to avoid any form of discrimination in the assessment process, ensuring that assessment methods do not disadvantage any particular group. They should be trained in cultural competence and inclusive practices, providing support and adjustments for applicants with disabilities.

Practitioners should ensure that all applicants have equal opportunities to succeed, promoting a culture of respect and inclusion in the RPL process.

#### **4.1.6. RPL Should Be Accessible**

RPL practitioners must ensure that their services are easily accessible to all potential applicants, providing information in various formats to accommodate different needs. They need to offer support services, such as translation or interpretation, if required, and make physical locations accessible to individuals with mobility issues.

Practitioners should use clear and simple language in all communications, providing flexible appointment times to accommodate applicants' schedules, even if it means organising assessment sessions only once in a while during the year. They need to ensure that online services are user-friendly and accessible, providing assistance with technology if applicants face digital literacy challenges.

Practitioners should ensure that applicants know how to access support services, continuously improving accessibility practices.

#### **4.1.7. RPL Should Be flexible**

RPL practitioners should adapt their methods to meet the individual needs of applicants, being open to using different types of evidence for assessment. They need to accommodate various learning styles



and experiences, offering different assessment methods to suit applicants' strengths (e.g., no written tests to applicants with a low level of literacy).

Practitioners should be willing to adjust timelines to fit applicants' circumstances, providing alternative ways to submit evidence in the preparatory process, such as online or in-person. They need to be flexible in scheduling assessments and meetings, responding promptly to any changes in applicants' situations.

Practitioners should continuously seek feedback to improve flexibility, embracing a flexible approach to enhance the RPL experience for applicants.

#### **4.1.8. Assess Learning Outcomes and Not Just the Duration of the Experience**

Practitioners should focus on the actual knowledge and skills applicants have gained, ensuring that assessments are based on learning outcomes rather than time spent learning. They need to use existing standards or develop clear criteria for assessing learning outcomes, using authentic assessment methods that reflect real-life tasks.

Practitioners should avoid assumptions based on the duration of applicants' experiences, recognising that valuable learning can occur in short, intense periods; and that this is a personal characteristic. They should provide examples of how to demonstrate learning outcomes, offering guidance on compiling evidence that shows learning achievements.

Practitioners should use a variety of assessment tools to capture all aspects of learning, ensuring that assessments are fair and valid in evaluating learning outcomes.

#### **4.1.9. Propose a Transparent Valid Reliable Fair and Authentic Assessment**

Practitioners must ensure that the assessment process is clearly explained to RPL applicants, providing detailed information about assessment criteria and methods. They need to ensure that all assessments are conducted consistently, using reliable and valid assessment tools.

Practitioners should ensure that assessments are based on objective evidence, providing constructive feedback to applicants on their performance. They need to maintain transparency throughout the assessment process, continuously reviewing and improving their assessment practices. Ensuring the authenticity of assessments is crucial for maintaining credibility, with practitioners ensuring that the assessment process is fair to all applicants.

#### **4.1.10. Recognised Learning Outcomes Acquired in Non-formal and Informal Contexts are of Equal Value to Learning Outcomes Acquired in Formal Contexts**

Practitioners should value all learning experiences, regardless of where they occurred, recognising the diverse ways in which individuals acquire learning outcomes. They need to ensure that non-formal and informal learning outcomes are assessed on the same basis as formal learning outcomes, using inclusive assessment methods that capture all types of learning.

Practitioners should provide guidance on documenting non-formal and informal learning, ensuring that assessments are fair and unbiased. They need to educate stakeholders about the value of non-formal and informal learning, promoting the recognition of diverse learning pathways.

Practitioners should continuously update their knowledge of non-formal and informal learning, ensuring that all learning outcomes are valued equally to promote lifelong learning.

#### **4.1.11. Always Explain the Decisions of the RPL Assessors**

Practitioners must ensure that the rationale behind assessment decisions is clearly communicated to applicants. They need to provide detailed feedback that helps applicants understand the strengths and weaknesses of their submissions, regardless of whether there is a possibility for an appeal. This transparency builds trust in the RPL process and helps applicants feel respected and valued. Explaining decisions thoroughly also provides applicants with the opportunity to learn and improve; and potentially try their luck again if they failed.

Practitioners should use clear and simple language in their explanations to ensure that all applicants understand. They need to be prepared to answer any questions applicants may have about the assessment outcomes. Providing detailed explanations can also help mitigate any feelings of frustration or confusion.

Practitioners should document their decisions and the reasons behind them for future reference. This practice of thorough explanation promotes fairness and accountability in the RPL process. Ensuring that applicants receive comprehensive feedback supports their ongoing learning and development.

#### **4.1.12. Involve a Formal Assessment of Complaints**

Practitioners must have a clear and structured process for handling complaints about assessments. This process should be communicated to all applicants at the beginning of the RPL process. Practitioners need to ensure that the complaints procedure is fair, transparent, and easily accessible. They should treat all complaints with seriousness and urgency, providing timely responses. An impartial review of the complaint should be conducted to ensure fairness.

Practitioners should keep detailed records of all complaints and their resolutions. Applicants should be informed of their right to appeal decisions, if the country allows, and the steps involved in doing so. Providing clear guidelines on how to submit a complaint helps maintain the integrity of the RPL process.

Practitioners should use feedback from complaints to improve their assessment practices. Ensuring a robust complaints process reinforces trust in the RPL system and supports applicants' rights.

#### **4.1.13. Propose Alternatives to Failed Applicants**

Practitioners should provide constructive feedback and alternatives to applicants whose RPL applications are rejected, or to those who failed the final assessment. They need to help applicants understand the reasons for their rejection or failure and what steps they can take next. Offering temporary qualifications or modules can help applicants gain the additional learning outcomes needed to meet targeted standards.

Practitioners should provide guidance on relevant courses, training programmes, or other learning opportunities. This support helps applicants stay motivated and continue their learning journey. Practitioners should maintain a positive and encouraging attitude to help applicants overcome setbacks. Providing a clear pathway for applicants to achieve their goals demonstrates commitment to their success.

Practitioners should follow up with applicants to monitor their progress and offer further support if needed. Ensuring that applicants have access to resources and support services is crucial. Helping applicants find alternatives keeps them engaged in the learning process and enhances their chances of success.

#### **4.1.14. There is Internal and External Monitoring and Evaluation**

Practitioners should conduct both internal and external evaluations to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the RPL process. Internal evaluations involve self-assessment and continuous improvement based on feedback and outcomes.

Practitioners should regularly review their practices and make adjustments as necessary to maintain high standards. External evaluations provide an objective perspective and can identify areas for improvement that may be overlooked internally.

Practitioners should welcome external audits and evaluations as opportunities for growth and enhancement. Combining internal and external evaluations helps create a comprehensive quality assurance framework.

Practitioners should document the findings from both types of evaluations and develop action plans to address any issues. Sharing best practices and learning from other institutions can help improve the overall RPL process.

Practitioners should ensure that evaluation results are communicated to all stakeholders to maintain transparency. Continuous evaluation and improvement are essential for maintaining the credibility and effectiveness of the RPL system.

#### **4.1.15. RPL Should Be in Line with Any Statutory Legislation**

Practitioners must ensure that their practices comply with all relevant statutory legislation and regulatory requirements. They should stay informed about any changes in laws or regulations that impact the RPL process. Compliance with statutory legislation helps protect the rights of applicants and maintain the integrity of the RPL system.

Practitioners should incorporate legal requirements into their policies and procedures. They need to provide training and resources to ensure that all staff members understand and follow legal guidelines.

Practitioners should conduct regular reviews to ensure ongoing compliance with statutory legislation. They need to be prepared to make necessary adjustments to their practices in response to legal changes.

Practitioners should seek legal advice when uncertain about compliance issues. Maintaining compliance with statutory legislation fosters trust and confidence in the RPL process. Practitioners should document all compliance efforts and be transparent about their commitment to legal adherence.

This is a non-exhaustive list based on extensive fieldwork in many countries. It is intended to guide the work of the group which will be responsible for drawing up the final guidelines – i.e., contextualised to each African country – but it is merely indicative.

#### **4.1.16. RPL Process should be Quality Assured**

Incorporate quality assurance in the RPL process for efficiency, effectiveness and continual improvement of RPL process, and trust and credibility of the RPL system.

#### **4.1.17. Post-RPL support**

Conduct post-RPL-Assessment follow up support and provide feedback to all the key actors who participated in the RPL assessment for purposes of continuous improvement of the process. These include Candidates to help them realise their full potential; RPL Practitioners, Institutions (RPL Coordinators) to assure quality of the whole assessment process; and Employers (Managers) to

effectively prepare for the RPL assessment and best leverage on the RPL outcomes as a talent management strategy. Finally, carry out tracer studies to establish the impact of RPL.

#### **4.2. Ensure that the Guidelines are Applied**

Quality assurance allows one to ask the following questions:

- Do we do what we have to do? This is, for example, what the law or national policy imposes on us.
- Are we doing what we plan to do? Has the strategy been implemented? It can be autonomous from the Law, because the RPL system can have its orientations.
- Do we make it work well? This refers to quality standards.
- What is planned to verify that it works well (e.g., indicators)? What if there is a possible remediation?

The quality assurance system makes expectations explicit. It is also a self-analysis tool for RPL centres (when the RPL system is scaled up to all the regions of a given country), according to these expectations.

In practice, an internal evaluation will make it possible to study what works or does not work. With an external evaluation, this result is compared with the opinion of the RPL centre.

That is, after the validation of these documents, the following fieldwork must begin: the work to co-construct the means to verify that the guidelines are applied.

#### **4.3. Examples of Good Practice in the Field of Quality Assurance**

Only for quality assurance, the following practices have proven convincing:

- ✓ Whenever possible, best practice would be to integrate quality assurance processes for RPL in the standard quality assurance processes and procedures of the RPL centre (after scaling up).
- ✓ An internal quality assurance process sometimes referred to as "moderation" or "verification" (in essence, a second verification of decisions made) must ensure that any assessment is fair and consistent (i.e., what has been awarded is fair and comparable to what has been awarded in similar situations). This process can be random to minimise expenses.
- ✓ The guidance officers cannot be assessors, and the other way around, because the assessment must be completely neutral. If the applicant and the assessor know each other, the assessment process cannot be neutral.
- ✓ Maintain a database collecting data regarding RPL applications and final decisions in terms of qualification granted to RPL applicants to compare similar applications to ensure consistency.
- ✓ Develop a checklist that includes a clear set of criteria that RPL assessors and moderators can use when assessing new applications.
- ✓ Ask applicants to prepare a portfolio of competences, which is meaningful to RPL assessors for use during the applicant's journey through assessment. The inclusion of any document written by the applicant can help confirm the authenticity of the portfolio, as well as help

identify applicant's learning outcomes and competence.

#### 4.4. Individual Assessment Pathway – The Core of the Work of RPL Practitioners

At this stage, in order to provide concrete elements to all stakeholders of the RPL system in their country, it is proposed that concrete elements for organising the pathway of each RPL applicant along are suggested (Table 2). At this stage, it is obviously only a menu, from which interested countries may select the relevant stages for them, and the next version of this Handbook will amplify every single stage for RPL practitioners to have a comprehensive view of their role, responsibilities, and duties.





There are more complicated menus, but they have not proven to be more effective.



There are also less complex menus, but they oftentimes missed key steps such as guidance.

#### 4.5. RPL institutional and Governance structures

Establish relevant governance structures for effective implementation of RPL, recruit and / or deploy a qualified, competent and experienced management to implement the RPL process.

**Table 2. Individual Assessment Pathway – A Menu**

<p><i>Initial information and guidance</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greeting learners (potential applicants)</li> <li>• Information and guidance to the potential applicant (comprehensive, with information about the benefits, the process and its potential duration)</li> <li>• Identification of the evidence to substantiate claim for application (partly with RPL practitioners)</li> <li>• Decision of the individual to apply</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of the administrative form</li> <li>• Guidance 1 (light)</li> <li>• Handover of the administrative form by the applicant</li> <li>• Waiting time (Decision to accept the application by the RPL practitioners)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Administrative registration</i></p> 
<p><i>Application screening and eligibility</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance 2 (intermediate, including advice about evidence gathering)</li> <li>• Handover of the eligibility portfolio</li> <li>• Eligibility interview</li> <li>• Waiting time (Decision to send the applicant to the assessment by RPL practitioners)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding what the final assessment is about</li> <li>• Elaborating a portfolio of competences, and/or documenting learning outcomes</li> </ul>	<p><i>Preparation of the final assessment</i></p> 

<p><i>Final assessment (of learning outcomes)</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance 3 (comprehensive, especially concerning the preparation to the assessment)</li> <li>• Handover of the portfolio of [self-analysed] learning outcomes.</li> <li>• Waiting time (Analysis of the portfolio of competences by assessor(s))</li> <li>• Waiting time (Convening notice send to applicants)</li> <li>• Supplementary assessment (see Box 11)</li> <li>• Interview with the panel of assessors</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waiting time (Validation of the learning outcomes)</li> <li>• Waiting time (Making and stamping of the qualification) – Recording of outcome</li> <li>• Awarding of a qualification to successful applicants.</li> <li>• Explaining the reasons for failure to unsuccessful applicants.</li> <li>• Suggestions for further practice, or formal education and training (top up learning).</li> </ul>	<p><i>Certification (of learning outcomes)</i></p> 

#### 4.6. RPL Step-by-step – Rationale, Stakeholders, Explanation and Examples

This section aims at providing all practitioners with a checklist of what could or should be done in practice, with a rather high level of details in order to provide a practical tool for all practitioners. This is not only a detailed description of the individual applicant’s pathway, which is provided in Section 4.4. Given the rather broad definition of “practitioner” adopted for this Handbook, this is a checklist for all practitioners, and therefore this checklist deals with both the supply and demand aspects (Sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4)

##### 4.6.1. Initial Information and Guidance

Phase 1 in short: Inform, motivate, build trust towards RPL and provide initial guidance (Table 3)

##### *Rationale – What is this phase about? What happens in this phase?*



The initial information and guidance phase is critical in the RPL process because it sets the foundation for the entire RPL journey. Phase 1 aims to provide potential applicants with a clear understanding of what RPL entails, the benefits it offers, and how the process works. It also addresses any concerns or misconceptions applicants may have, thereby ensuring they are well-prepared and confident to proceed with the subsequent phases.

Phase 1 is designed to build a solid foundation for the RPL process by ensuring applicants are well-informed, motivated, and adequately prepared to embark on their RPL journey. This phase addresses potential barriers and sets clear expectations, contributing to the overall success and effectiveness of the RPL process.

### *Who are the key actors and what are they expected to do?*



In Phase 1 of the RPL process, the key actors are the RPL practitioners and the applicants. RPL practitioners are expected to provide clear, comprehensive information about the RPL process, including its benefits, stages, and requirements. They play a crucial role in guiding applicants through the initial steps, offering personalised advice and support. Practitioners must ensure that applicants understand what RPL entails, how it can benefit their personal and professional growth, and what is expected of them throughout the process. They are responsible for clarifying any doubts, addressing common concerns, and dispelling myths about RPL. If practitioners create a welcoming and informative environment, applicants feel confident and motivated to proceed with their RPL journey. There is strong evidence that the quality of the greeting and of the information provided at the first contact point is a strong predictor of enrolment.

Applicants, on the other hand, are expected to actively engage with the information and guidance provided by the practitioners. They need to understand the RPL process, including the types of evidence required and how to gather it. Applicants should take advantage of the resources and support offered, such as workshops, self-assessment tools, and one-on-one sessions. It is essential for applicants to be proactive in preparing for the RPL process, collecting initial relevant evidence, and participating in guidance sessions. Applicants can more effectively navigate the initial phase, setting a strong foundation for their RPL journey, if they stay committed.

### *What are the benefits of this phase: for the RPL system, for take-up, for the applicants?*



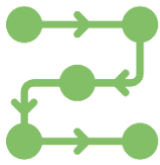
Phase 1 of the RPL process offers significant benefits for the RPL system, the take-up of the program, and the applicants themselves.

For the RPL system, Phase 1 ensures that the entire process starts on a solid foundation. By providing comprehensive initial information and guidance, the system can reduce misunderstandings and errors later on in the process, and dropout rates. This phase helps streamline the process, making it more efficient and reducing the administrative burden on practitioners. Clear communication and well-prepared applicants mean fewer delays and smoother transitions between the subsequent phases of RPL, enhancing the overall effectiveness and credibility of the RPL system.

Phase 1 is also crucial for take-up because RPL needs to attract and retain applicants. Clearly articulating the benefits of RPL and demystifying the process create the conditions for more individuals to likely consider and pursue RPL. Effective initial guidance reduces the apprehension and confusion that potential applicants may have, thereby increasing participation rates. When applicants see the process as accessible and supportive, they are more likely to commit to it, leading to higher take-up and completion rates.

For the applicants, Phase 1 provides essential clarity and confidence. They gain a thorough understanding of what RPL entails, including the benefits and requirements. This initial phase helps them see the value in having their prior learning outcomes and experiences formally recognised. With access to resources, self-assessment tools, and personalised guidance, applicants are better prepared to succeed in the RPL process. They feel supported and motivated, knowing what to expect and how to navigate the process effectively, which enhances their overall experience and likelihood of success. The whole Phase 1 is about building trust.

Main steps, tasks and tools



For clarity and simplicity of use, this section is presented in a table. It is a checklist designed for all countries and all practitioners. Therefore, some items may not be relevant in all contexts. It is meant to be a guidance tool for all practitioners not to forget any key step rather than a prescribe list of actions.

In addition, not all the steps described in Phase 1 (Table 3) will actually be carried out in Phase 1. Phase 1 is about explaining the entire process to potential applicants, hence the sense of overload of steps.

Table 3. Phase 1 of the RPL Process: Initial Information and Guidance in Detail

Steps of Phase 1	Description	Key Point	Key Point	Alternative Approach	Hindering Factors	Tools and Tricks
<b>1.1. Introduction to RPL</b>	Explain RPL and eligibility.	RPL: "RPL allows individuals to gain formal recognition for knowledge and skills they have, however they have been acquired, especially outside formal learning contexts.  For example, if you've managed projects in your job or in a not-for-profit organisation, RPL can acknowledge those project management skills towards a qualification."	Eligibility: "RPL is available to anyone who has acquired relevant knowledge and skills, whether through work, volunteering, or life experiences.  For instance, a chef with years of experience but no formal qualification can apply for RPL to earn a certificate in culinary arts."	Instead of individual meetings, conduct group workshops to explain RPL and eligibility criteria. This can save time and resources while providing applicants with peer support.	Lack of awareness or understanding of RPL among potential applicants, which may lead to low participation.	Use clear, simple language and real-life examples to explain RPL. Create engaging visual aids or videos to make the concept more accessible.  For example, avoid the term "learning outcomes" or any other jargon or scary words during the first discussion (e.g., assessment, examination, classroom)
<b>1.2. Benefits of RPL</b>	Discuss personal and professional growth, career advancement, and cost and time efficiency.	Personal and Professional Growth: "RPL helps you validate your skills, giving you a sense of achievement and boosting your	Career Advancement: "With RPL, you can qualify for higher positions or decent salary.	Provide an online platform where applicants can interact with RPL practitioners and peers, share success stories, and	Applicants may feel overwhelmed by the process or doubtful about their own knowledge and skills, leading to	Provide testimonials from successful RPL applicants to inspire confidence. Organise motivational sessions with



		<p>confidence. Imagine receiving a diploma recognising your expertise in ICT management after years of working in the field, or at home, without a formal qualification."</p>	<p>For example, an experienced construction worker could use RPL to qualify as a site supervisor."</p> <p>Cost and Time Efficiency: "RPL can save you time and money by reducing the need to repeat learning. For instance, a healthcare worker can skip certain modules of a nursing course by proving their knowledge and skills through RPL</p>	<p>seek advice. This could include forums, webinars, and video testimonials.</p>	<p>hesitation in applying for RPL.</p>	<p>these applicants to share their experiences.</p> <p>Be positive about potential applicants' knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Insist RPL is about what people have, not their drawbacks.</p>
<p><b>1.3. RPL Process Overview</b></p>	<p>Provide a step-by-step overview and timeline.</p>	<p>Stages of RPL: "The RPL process involves several stages" and explain them all in plain words.</p> <p>For instance, you start by meeting with an RPL advisor to discuss your experiences, then gather evidence like work samples or references, which are then evaluated by an assessor."</p>	<p>Timeline: "The RPL process typically takes between 3 to 6 months, depending on the complexity of your application and the amount of evidence you provide.</p> <p>It is longer for higher education qualifications (up to 18 months).</p> <p>But note all this is part time."</p>	<p>Create detailed online guides and video tutorials that walk applicants through each stage of the RPL process. These resources can be accessed at any time, allowing for self-paced learning.</p>	<p>Complexity of the RPL process and lengthy timelines can discourage applicants from starting or completing the process.</p>	<p>Break down the RPL process into smaller, manageable tasks and milestones. Use project management tools to help applicants track their progress.</p> <p>Use tools on smartphone, quite common these days.</p>
<p><b>1.4. Roles and Respon</b></p>	<p>Define applicant's and practitioner's roles.</p>	<p>Applicant's Role: "As an applicant, you'll need to actively participate by providing</p>	<p>Practitioner's Role: "Our role is to guide and support you through the</p>	<p>Develop an online portal where applicants can track their progress,</p>	<p>Applicants may not clearly understand their responsibility</p>	<p>Develop detailed role descriptions and guidelines. Conduct</p>

<p><b>sibilities</b></p>		<p>detailed evidence of your knowledge and skills.</p> <p>For instance, you may need to submit project reports, sounds or videos, photographs of your work, or testimonials from employers."</p>	<p>RPL process, helping you understand what evidence is needed and how to present it. We will also assess your evidence against the required standards."</p>	<p>upload evidence, and communicate with practitioners. This portal can also send reminders and updates to keep applicants engaged.</p>	<p>s or feel unsupported, causing confusion and delays. They may feel overwhelmed in the first place.</p>	<p>training sessions for applicants to clearly outline their responsibilities and the practitioner's support role.</p> <p>Use the proper pace for each applicant.</p>
<p><b>1.5. Initial Assessment, for eligibility and identifying the target qualification</b></p>	<p>Conduct a knowledge and skills audit and provide self-assessment tools.</p>	<p>Knowledge and Skills Audit: "We'll start with a knowledge and skills audit to map out your existing knowledge and skills. For example, if you're applying for RPL in early childhood education, we'll review your experience in childcare, lesson planning, and child development."</p>	<p>Self-Assessment Tools: "You can use our self-assessment tool to evaluate your own knowledge and skills. For instance, you may rate your proficiency in various software if you're seeking RPL in ICT support."</p>	<p>Use digital self-assessment tools that automatically match applicants' knowledge and skills to potential qualifications. This can streamline the initial assessment process and provide immediate feedback.</p>	<p>Difficulty in self-assessment due to lack of confidence or inability to identify and articulate their knowledge and skills and experiences.</p>	<p>Offer one-on-one sessions to help applicants with self-assessment. Provide examples of how to document knowledge and skills and experiences effectively.</p>
<p><b>1.6. Evidence Requirements for the final assessment</b></p>	<p>Explain types of evidence and how to collect them.</p>	<p>Types of Evidence: "Acceptable evidence includes work samples, certificates, job descriptions, and reflective essays. For example, a graphic designer may submit a portfolio of their work and client feedback."</p>	<p>Evidence Collection: "When collecting evidence, ensure it is well-organised and clearly presented. For instance, if you're providing a project report, include an introduction, objectives, your role, outcomes, and any supporting documents."</p>	<p>Provide templates and examples of high-quality evidence submissions online. Encourage applicants to attend virtual workshops on effective evidence collection and presentation.</p>	<p>Applicants may struggle to collect and present appropriate evidence, especially if they lack documentation, have informal experience, or have issue with written documents.</p>	<p>Create checklists and templates for evidence collection. Offer workshops or online tutorials on how to gather and present evidence.</p> <p>Accept any kind of evidence, way beyond written documents.</p>

<p><b>1.7. Support and Resources</b></p>	<p>Inform about support services and provide resource materials.</p>	<p>Support Services: "We offer workshops and mentoring sessions to help you through the RPL process. For example, you can attend a workshop on how to document bricklaying or write effective reflective essays."</p>	<p>Resource Materials: "Access our RPL guides, templates, and successful examples on our website. For instance, you can download examples of photographs or a template for documenting your work experience and matching it to the qualification criteria."</p>	<p>Offer virtual office hours where applicants can drop in and ask questions. Additionally, create an FAQ section on the website addressing common concerns and providing clear answers.</p>	<p>Limited access to support services and resources, especially for applicants in remote areas or those with limited internet access.</p>	<p>Develop a resource hub with easily accessible support materials. Use multiple channels (email, chat, video calls) to provide ongoing support. Maximise the use of smartphone, and minimise written communication and evidence</p>
<p><b>1.8. Addressing Concerns</b></p>	<p>Address common questions and dispel myths.</p>	<p>Common Questions: "Applicants often ask about the confidentiality of their evidence, and whether their employer will be aware. Rest assured, all submitted materials are kept strictly confidential and used solely for assessment purposes."</p>	<p>Myth-Busting: "Some believe RPL is an easier option, but it requires demonstrating the same level of knowledge and skills as traditional learning. For instance, you need to show in-depth knowledge and practical skills, just like in other qualification processes."</p>	<p>Create a myth-busting section on the website where common misconceptions about RPL are addressed through articles, videos, and infographics. Use real-life case studies to illustrate these points.</p>	<p>Prevalence of myths and misconceptions about RPL can deter applicants from pursuing this pathway or cause unnecessary anxiety. Fight against "this is not for me".</p>	<p>Use interactive Q&amp;A sessions to address common myths and concerns. Regularly update a myth-busting FAQ section on the website. Send reassuring or reminder SMS on a regular basis.</p>
<p><b>1.9. Initial Guidance Session</b></p>	<p>Offer personalised guidance and develop an action plan.</p>	<p>Personalised Guidance: "In your initial session, we'll discuss your background, career goals, and the RPL process tailored to your needs. For example, if you're a car</p>	<p>Action Plan: "We'll develop an action plan outlining steps you need to take, support available, and key milestones. For instance, your action</p>	<p>Develop an online action planning tool that helps applicants set goals, track progress, and receive automated reminders. This tool can be integrated with the evidence</p>	<p>Applicants may not have access to personalised guidance or find it challenging to follow an action plan without continuous support.</p>	<p>Schedule regular follow-up sessions and provide reminders. Use digital tools to help applicants set and track their goals.</p>

		mechanic or a hospitality manager, we'll identify specific qualifications to target, and at which level, and relevant evidence you need."	plan may include attending a portfolio development workshop and submitting evidence within two months."	submission portal.	They may not have access to internet.	Allow for more traditional approaches for those not connected.
<b>1.10. Follow-Up</b>	Schedule regular check-ins and request feedback.	Regular Check-Ins: "We'll schedule regular check-ins to monitor your progress and provide ongoing support. For example, we'll review your evidence drafts and give feedback to ensure they meet the assessment criteria."	Feedback: "We value your feedback on the initial information and guidance process to improve our services. After your RPL assessment, we'll ask you to complete a survey about your experience."	Implement a feedback loop through online surveys and virtual focus groups. Use this feedback to continuously improve the RPL process and address any issues applicants may face.	Lack of regular follow-up and feedback can lead to applicants feeling abandoned or losing motivation to complete the RPL process.	Implement a feedback system to continuously improve the process. Use positive reinforcement and celebrate small milestones to keep applicants motivated.
<b>1.11. Initial Consultation</b>	Schedule an initial consultation to discuss the applicant's goals and readiness for RPL.	"During the initial consultation, we will discuss your career goals, previous experiences, and how RPL can help you achieve your objectives."	"We will assess your readiness for RPL and provide an overview of the process, including timelines and expectations."	Offer virtual consultations to accommodate applicants who are unable to attend in person.	Applicants may feel uncertain about their readiness for RPL, leading to hesitation in scheduling a consultation.	Provide a checklist of items to prepare before the consultation to help applicants feel more confident and prepared.
<b>1.12. Portfolio Development</b>	Assist applicants in developing a comprehensive and reflexive portfolio of competences.	"We will guide you in creating a portfolio that includes work samples, certificates, and reflective essays."	"Your portfolio should showcase your knowledge and skills, providing detailed evidence of your competence."	Offer online portfolio development workshops to help applicants understand the requirements and best practices.	Applicants may struggle with organising and presenting their evidence effectively.	Provide templates and examples of well-organised portfolios. Offer one-on-one support to address specific challenges.  Accept all sort of evidence (including sounds, video, image)
<b>1.13. Final</b>	Prepare applicants for	"We will provide you	"Mock assessments	Create a series of instructional	Applicants may feel	Conduct practice

<b>Assessment Preparation</b>	the final assessment process.	with detailed information on the assessment criteria and what to expect during the assessment.”	can help you understand the types of questions and tasks you will be required to complete.”	videos that explain the assessment process and provide tips for success.	anxious about the assessment process and uncertain about how to prepare.	assessments and provide constructive feedback to build confidence and readiness.  Insist the final assessment is professionals talking to a professional, not teachers talking to a pupil.
<b>1.14. Post-Assessment Support</b>	Provide support and guidance after the assessment.	“We will review your assessment results with you and discuss any areas for improvement or further action.”	“If additional evidence is needed, we will guide you on how to collect and present it.”	Offer follow-up consultations via video call to review assessment outcomes and next steps.	Applicants may feel discouraged by their assessment results and uncertain about the next steps.	Offer positive reinforcement and clear guidance on how to address any gaps identified during the assessment.
<b>1.15. Continuous Improvement</b>	Encourage ongoing improvement and professional development.	“We will provide you with resources and recommendations for further learning and development.”	“Regular check-ins and feedback sessions will help you continue to improve and achieve your career goals.”	Create an online community where applicants can share their progress, challenges, and successes.	Applicants may lose motivation after the initial RPL process is completed.	Celebrate milestones and achievements, and provide opportunities for further engagement and development.

### *Self-assessment and reflexivity*

In order to help practitioners, a short self-assessment is proposed for helping them to reflect on their understanding of this phase. Beyond self-assessment, this list could also be used to engage with peers. There is no good or bad responses, and most questions have multiple context-dependent responses:

- ✓ You have been drawn into a team of experts to offer advice to your government on the impending development of policies and guidelines on the validation and recognition of learning. Briefly discuss the key features or principles to be considered under the following: Policy or recognition of learning outcomes vs. recognition of qualification.  
  
This question aims to foster critical thinking and practical policy development skills among practitioners.
- ✓ Define the modes used for the validation and recognition of learning in your own words.  
  
This is to encourages practitioners to reflect on the different approaches to validating and recognising prior learning outcomes, enhancing their understanding of the process.

- ✓ How would you explain the concept of RPL to a potential applicant who is unfamiliar with it?  
This question encourages practitioners to think about how to communicate the fundamental concept of RPL in a clear and accessible manner.
- ✓ Which strategies would you use to highlight the benefits of RPL to applicants to motivate them to engage in the process?  
This question prompts practitioners to consider effective ways to convey the advantages of RPL, such as career advancement and personal growth.
- ✓ How can you ensure that the information and guidance you provide are inclusive and accessible to all potential applicants, regardless of their background or education level?  
This question encourages reflection on inclusivity and accessibility in the initial guidance phase.
- ✓ What are the most common misconceptions about RPL that you have encountered, or can think about, and how do you address them?  
This question helps practitioners identify and think about how to correct common misunderstandings about RPL.
- ✓ How would you tailor the initial assessment tools to suit the diverse needs and backgrounds of different applicants?  
This question prompts consideration of customisation and personalisation in the assessment process to accommodate various applicant profiles.
- ✓ What role does the initial guidance session play in setting the tone for the entire RPL process, and how can you make this session most effective?  
This question focuses on the importance of the first interaction with applicants and how to make it impactful, and not too impressive.
- ✓ How can you ensure that applicants fully understand the types of evidence required and how to effectively collect and present it?  
This question encourages strategies for clear communication and support regarding evidence collection.
- ✓ In what ways can follow-up sessions and continuous support improve the RPL process for applicants?  
This question prompts reflection on the importance of ongoing support and follow-up throughout the RPL process.
- ✓ How can you leverage technology to enhance the initial information and guidance phase of the RPL process?  
This question encourages thinking about the integration of digital tools and resources to improve the guidance provided, especially smartphones.
- ✓ Reflect on a time when you successfully guided a applicant through the initial phase of the RPL process, if any. What were the key factors that contributed to this success?  
This question allows practitioners to draw on their own experiences to identify best practices

and successful strategies.

- ✓ Explain the role of the competent recognition authorities and education institutions involved in the recognition of qualifications, with reference to your country.

This is to help practitioners to consider the specific responsibilities and contributions of various entities in the RPL process.

- ✓ Learning achieved through non-formal and informal settings should not be of equal standing to formal learning. Argue for or against this statement.

- ✓ This question encourages practitioners to critically evaluate the relative value of different types of learning, promoting a deeper understanding of the principles behind RPL.

- ✓ Discuss the content of different phases described in this section, and the role of the redundancies to ensure the main messages are understood. Start selecting the most important for your country.

This question helps practitioners to visualise and comprehend the sequential phase and steps involved in the RPL process, improving their ability to guide applicants effectively

#### 4.6.2. Administrative Registration

Phase 2: Identify applicants, ensure fairness of the process (Table 4)
------------------------------------------------------------------------

##### *Rationale – What is this phase about? What happens in this phase?*

The Phase 2 is essential in formalising the applicant's participation in the RPL process. This phase ensures that all necessary documentation and information would be available and verifiable, setting a solid foundation for the subsequent stages. Meticulously handling administrative tasks such as application submission, document verification, fee payment, and the creation of applicant records helps the process to be more streamlined, reducing potential issues and delays later on in the process. This systematic approach not only establishes the applicant's official entry into the RPL process but also ensures that all required information is properly documented, thereby enhancing the efficiency and reliability of the entire RPL system.

Moreover, this phase involves providing applicants with comprehensive information packs that outline the RPL process, key dates, and contact information. This proactive communication ensures that applicants are well-informed and prepared for the upcoming stages, and therefore it reduces anxiety and increase engagement. The thorough administrative groundwork laid in this phase fosters a clear, structured, and supportive environment for applicants, which is crucial for their confidence and success in the RPL process.

This phase is not about content eligibility nor assessment, which are coming later, it is about “administrative eligibility”.

##### *Who are the key actors and what are they expected to do?*

In Phase 2, the key actors include again the RPL practitioners, especially those in charge of the administration of the system, and the applicants themselves. RPL practitioners are responsible for guiding applicants through the administrative requirements of the RPL process. They must ensure that application forms are correctly completed, all necessary [administrative] documents are submitted and verified, and fees are paid. Practitioners also create and maintain accurate records for each applicant, provide comprehensive information packs, and schedule initial meetings to discuss the RPL

process. Their role is pivotal in ensuring that the administrative aspects are handled efficiently, and they must provide clear, ongoing communication to support applicants throughout this phase.

Applicants, on the other hand, are expected to actively engage with the administrative requirements of the RPL process. This includes accurately completing and submitting application forms, providing necessary documents, and paying required fees promptly, if any. They must also carefully review the information packs provided, preparing themselves for the next stages of the RPL process. Active participation and timely response from applicants are crucial, as these elements contribute to a smooth and efficient administrative process, setting the stage for successful progression through the RPL journey.

***What are the benefits of this phase: for the RPL system, for take-up, for the applicants?***

For the RPL system, Phase 2 ensures a structured and reliable administrative process, which is essential for maintaining the integrity and efficiency of the entire RPL framework. Systematically collecting and verifying applicant information helps the RPL system to operate smoothly, minimising errors and delays. This organised approach enhances the credibility of the RPL system and facilitates better management and tracking of applicant progress.

For take-up, a clear and well-managed administrative registration phase can significantly boost participation. When applicants perceive the process as well-organised and supportive, they are more likely to engage and proceed with their RPL applications. Transparent communication and efficient handling of administrative tasks create a positive first impression, encouraging more individuals to consider and pursue RPL opportunities.

For the applicants, Phase 2 provides clarity and support, making the RPL process accessible and manageable. Applicants benefit from receiving detailed information and guidance, which helps them understand what is required and how to navigate the process. This support reduces anxiety and builds confidence, ensuring that applicants are well-prepared for the subsequent stages of the RPL journey. Overall, an effective administrative registration phase enhances the applicant experience, contributing to higher satisfaction and success rates in the RPL process.

***Main steps, tasks and tools***

For clarity and simplicity of use, this section is presented in a table. It is a checklist designed for all countries and all practitioners. Therefore, some items may not be relevant in all contexts. It is meant to be a guidance tool for all practitioners not to forget any key step rather than a prescribe list of actions.

In addition, not all the steps described in Phase 2 (Table 4) will actually be effective in all countries. For example, some countries have decided that RPL would be free for participants and therefore Step 2.3 is void.

**Table 4. Phase 2 of the RPL Process: Administrative Registration in Detail**

<b>Steps of Phase 2</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Key Point</b>	<b>Key Point</b>	<b>Alternative Approach</b>	<b>Hindering Factors</b>	<b>Tools and Tricks</b>
<b>2.1. Application Submission</b>	Guide applicants through the submission of their RPL application form.	Applicants need to complete and submit the RPL application form, providing all required	Ensure the application form is submitted online or in-person to the	Offer an online portal where applicants can easily fill and submit their application forms.	Applicants may find the application form complicated or time-consuming.	Provide clear instructions and a checklist of required information. Offer support through SMS,



		personal and professional details.	designated RPL office.			email or helplines.
<b>2.2. Verification of Documents</b>	Verify the authenticity of submitted documents and credentials.	Review and verify the documents submitted by the applicant, such as certificates and work experience letters.	Contact previous employers or educational institutions to confirm the authenticity of the documents.	Use digital verification tools to streamline the document verification process.	Delayed responses from third parties can slow down the verification process.	Maintain a database of verified documents and institutions to expedite future verifications.
<b>2.3. Fee Payment</b>	Collect the required fees for the RPL process, if any.	Inform the applicant of the fee structure and payment methods available for the RPL process.	Applicants must pay the fees via bank transfer, online payment portal, or in-person at the RPL office.	Offer multiple payment options, including instalment plans, to accommodate different financial situations.	Applicants may face difficulties with payment methods or financial constraints.	Provide detailed payment instructions and support for applicants facing payment issues.
<b>2.4. Confirmation of Registration</b>	Confirm the registration of the applicant in the RPL programme.	Send an SMS, email or letter confirming the applicant's registration in the RPL programme after all documents are verified and fees are paid.	Provide a registration number and contact information for further assistance.	Automate the confirmation process through an online system that sends instant confirmation upon successful registration.	Technical issues or delays in processing can cause confusion for applicants.	Ensure the registration system is reliable and provide immediate support for any issues.
<b>2.5. Creation of Applicant Record</b>	Create and maintain a record for each RPL applicant.	Enter the applicant's details into the RPL database, including personal information, submitted documents, and payment status.	Maintain a digital record that can be easily updated and accessed by the RPL team.	Use a secure cloud-based system to store and manage applicant records.	Manual data entry can lead to errors or loss of information.	Implement regular audits and data backups to ensure the accuracy and security of records.
<b>2.6. Provision of Information Pack</b>	Provide an information pack to the applicant outlining the RPL process.	Provide an information pack containing details about the RPL process, key dates, and contact	Include guidelines on how to prepare for the next steps in the RPL process.	Provide access to a digital information pack that applicants can download from the RPL portal.	Applicants may overlook important information in the pack.	Highlight key points and deadlines in the information pack. Use videos sent on smartphone.

		information to the registered applicants.				Follow up with reminders.
<b>2.7. Scheduling of Initial Meetings</b>	Schedule initial meetings with applicants to discuss the RPL process and next steps.	Arrange a meeting with the applicant to discuss their RPL journey, including the evidence collection process and assessment criteria.	Provide options for in-person or virtual meetings to accommodate different preferences.	Use an online scheduling tool to allow applicants to choose a convenient time for their meeting.	Scheduling conflicts or lack of availability can delay the process.	Offer flexible meeting times and multiple communication channels for scheduling.

### *Self-assessment and reflexivity*

In order to help practitioners, a short self-assessment is proposed for helping them to reflect on their understanding of this phase. Beyond self-assessment, this list could also be used to engage with peers. There is no good or bad response, and most questions have multiple context-dependent responses:

- ✓ Explain the role of the competent administrative authorities, recognition authorities and education institutions involved in the RPL system, with reference to your country.

This question helps practitioners to consider the specific responsibilities and contributions of various entities in registration process.

- ✓ What are the key elements to include in an effective RPL application form to ensure all necessary administrative information is collected from the applicants?

This question prompts practitioners to think about the essential components of the application form and how to design it for completeness.

- ✓ How can you streamline the verification of documents to ensure a quick and efficient registration process without compromising accuracy?

This question encourages reflection on balancing efficiency and accuracy in the document verification process.

- ✓ What are the potential challenges applicants may face during the fee payment process, and how can these be mitigated?

This question helps practitioners consider financial barriers and how to address them to facilitate smoother administrative registration.

- ✓ How do you ensure clear and timely communication with applicants throughout the administrative registration phase?

This question focuses on the importance of effective communication and strategies to maintain it throughout the registration process.

- ✓ What are the best practices for maintaining and updating applicant records to ensure data accuracy and confidentiality?

This question prompts practitioners to think about data management practices that

safeguard applicant information while keeping it up-to-date.

- ✓ How can the provision of an information pack be improved to better prepare applicants for the subsequent phases of the RPL process?

This question encourages consideration of the content and delivery of the information pack to maximise its usefulness to applicants.

- ✓ What strategies can you implement to ensure the initial meetings with applicants are productive and address their individual needs and concerns?

This question focuses on personalising the initial interactions to make them more effective for each applicant.

- ✓ Reflect on a time when you successfully managed the administrative registration phase for a applicant, if any. What were the key factors that contributed to this success?

This question allows practitioners to draw on their own experiences to identify best practices and successful strategies in managing registration.

- ✓ How can technology be leveraged to enhance the administrative registration phase of the RPL process?

This question encourages thinking about the integration of digital tools and resources to improve the registration process.

- ✓ What measures can you take to ensure equity and accessibility in the administrative registration process for all applicants, regardless of their background?

This question prompts reflection on inclusivity and accessibility to ensure that all applicants can navigate the registration process smoothly.

#### **4.6.3. Application Screening and Eligibility**

Phase 3 in short: Right to apply; screen out illegitimate applicants, remain economically viable (Table 5)

##### ***Rationale – What is this phase about? What happens in this phase?***

Phase 3 is critical in ensuring that only legitimate applicants proceed through the RPL process. This phase involves a thorough review of each applicant's application to verify the authenticity and relevance of their submitted evidence. By conducting a detailed assessment of the applicants' qualifications, work experience, and supporting documents, practitioners ensure that the standards and criteria of the RPL process are met. This rigorous screening process helps maintain the integrity and credibility of the RPL system, ensuring that only those who meet the necessary requirements are allowed to advance.

In addition, Phase 3 is essential for providing applicants with clear feedback on their eligibility status, in relation to the content of their experiences and corresponding learning outcomes. This phase not only assesses the applicants' submitted materials but also identifies any gaps or additional requirements needed for eligibility. This feedback is crucial for applicants as it guides them on the necessary steps to meet the criteria if they are not initially eligible. Clearly communicating the results of the screening process and offering guidance on how to address any deficiencies, create the conditions for this phase to support applicants in preparing thoroughly for the subsequent stages of the RPL process.

### *Who are the key actors and what are they expected to do?*

In Phase 3, the key actors include RPL practitioners, especially pre-assessors, and the applicants themselves. RPL practitioners are responsible for conducting a thorough review of the applications, verifying the authenticity of the submitted evidence, and ensuring that all documentation meets the established standards. They must meticulously cross-check information, contact referees or previous employers if necessary, and make informed decisions about the applicants' eligibility. Practitioners are also responsible for communicating the results of the screening process to the applicants, providing detailed feedback and guidance on any additional requirements needed.

Applicants, on the other hand, play an active role by submitting comprehensive and accurate applications that include all necessary documentation and evidence of their prior learning outcomes and experiences. They need to respond promptly to any requests for additional information or clarification from the practitioners. If deemed ineligible, applicants must carefully review the feedback provided and take the necessary steps to address any deficiencies. This proactive engagement ensures that applicants are fully prepared and qualified for the next stages of the RPL process.

### *What are the benefits of this phase: for the RPL system, for take-up, for the applicants?*

For the RPL system, Phase 3 ensures that the process maintains high standards and credibility by rigorously checking applicants' evidence. This thorough screening process helps prevent illegitimate applicants from advancing, which in turn upholds the integrity of the qualifications issued after the RPL process. By maintaining these standards, the RPL system enhances its reputation and reliability, encouraging trust from both applicants and industry stakeholders. It also helps in minimising the cost of the RPL system for a country as inviting too many illegitimate applicants will necessarily lead to extra costs.

For take-up, a clear and fair initial screening process can increase participation by providing transparency and confidence in the RPL system. When applicants understand that the process is rigorous but fair, they are more likely to apply, knowing that their experiences and corresponding learning outcomes will be thoroughly and objectively assessed. This can attract a larger pool of applicants who are serious about gaining formal recognition for their prior learning outcomes.

For the applicants, Phase 3 offers crucial insights into their eligibility status, helping them understand where they stand in the RPL process. Detailed feedback and guidance provided during this phase can help applicants identify areas that need improvement or additional documentation, making the process more transparent and supportive. This guidance ensures that applicants are well-prepared and eligible, ultimately increasing their chances of success in obtaining RPL qualification. The clarity and direction provided in this phase empower applicants to take the necessary steps to meet the required standards, enhancing their overall experience and outcomes in the RPL process.

### *Main steps, tasks and tools*

For clarity and simplicity of use, this section is presented in a table. It is a checklist designed for all countries and all practitioners. Therefore, some items may not be relevant in all contexts. It is meant to be a guidance tool for all practitioners not to forget any key step rather than a prescribe list of actions.

It is of paramount importance to understand that passing the eligibility phase only provides RPL applicants to have the right to apply. It is by no means a predictor of success in the final assessment process.

Table 5. Phase 3 of the RPL Process: Application Screening and Eligibility in Detail

Steps of Phase 3	Description	Key Point	Key Point	Alternative Approach	Hindering Factors	Tools and Tricks
<b>3.1. Initial Screening</b>	Perform a preliminary check of the application for completeness and correctness.	Ensure that all required fields in the application form are filled out and that all necessary documents are attached.	Contact the applicant if any information or documents are missing from the application.	Implement an automated system that flags incomplete applications for follow-up.	Incomplete applications can delay the screening process.	Provide a checklist of required documents and information to applicants before they submit their application.
<b>3.2. Detailed Review of Application</b>	Conduct a thorough review of the applicant's submission.	Review the applicant's work experience, existing qualifications, and other relevant details in depth.	Cross-check the information provided with the attached evidence.	Use a digital platform to streamline the review process and allow for collaborative review by multiple practitioners.	Manual reviews can be time-consuming and prone to human error.	Develop a standardised review template to ensure consistency and completeness.
<b>3.3. Eligibility Criteria Check</b>	Verify that the applicant meets the established eligibility criteria for RPL.	Compare the applicant's qualifications and experience against the RPL eligibility criteria.	Document any areas where the applicant does not meet the criteria and prepare recommendations.	Create a clear eligibility matrix that simplifies the comparison process.	Ambiguities in eligibility criteria can lead to inconsistent decisions.	Regularly update and clarify eligibility criteria to ensure they are straightforward and unambiguous.
<b>3.4. Verification of Evidence</b>	Ensure that all submitted evidence is faithful and relevant.	Verify certificates, work samples, and other evidence provided by the applicant.	Contact referees or previous employers provided to confirm the authenticity of the evidence.	Use digital verification tools and third-party services to validate documents.	Verification can be delayed if third parties are unresponsive.	Build relationships with common third-party verifiers to facilitate quicker responses.
<b>3.5. Applicant Interview</b>	Conduct an interview with the applicant to further assess their eligibility.	Schedule an interview with the applicant to discuss their application and clarify any uncertainties.	Use the interview to assess the applicant's communication skills and depth of knowledge.	Offer both in-person and virtual interview options to accommodate applicants' preferences.	Scheduling conflicts can delay the interview process.	Provide flexible interview slots and send reminders to ensure timely participation.  In complex case, invite an assessor to pre-assess the

						potential applicant.
<b>3.6. Decision Making</b>	Make a final decision on the applicant's eligibility for RPL.	Review all gathered information and make a decision regarding the applicant's eligibility.	Document the reasons for the decision and any conditions that apply.	Use a decision-making panel to ensure impartiality and fairness.	Bias or lack of consensus can affect decision quality.	Establish clear decision-making guidelines and include multiple reviewers to mitigate bias.
<b>3.7. Feedback to Applicant</b>	Provide the applicant with feedback on their application and the decision.	Inform the applicant of the decision and provide detailed feedback on their application.	Offer suggestions for improvement or alternative pathways if the application is unsuccessful.	Use personalised feedback SMS, emails or letters to provide constructive and encouraging feedback.	Negative feedback can discourage applicants.	Frame feedback positively and provide clear, actionable advice for improvement.
<b>3.8 Post RPL Assessment follow up</b>						

### *Self-assessment and reflexivity*

In order to help practitioners, a short self-assessment is proposed for helping them to reflect on their understanding of this phase. Beyond self-assessment, this list could also be used to engage with peers. There is no good or bad response, and most questions have multiple context-dependent responses:

- ✓ What criteria do you use to determine whether their administrative registration of applicants for the RPL process is valid? How do you ensure these criteria are fair and inclusive?  
This question encourages practitioners to reflect on the fairness and inclusivity of their eligibility criteria.
- ✓ Describe a time when you had to screen an application for RPL, if any. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?  
This question helps practitioners think about real-world application of their screening processes and problem-solving approach.
- ✓ How do you verify the authenticity and accuracy of the evidence provided by applicants during the application screening?  
This question prompts practitioners to consider methods for ensuring the reliability of the evidence submitted.
- ✓ What steps do you take to communicate the results of the administrative screening to applicants, and how do you ensure this communication is clear and supportive?  
This question focuses on the importance of effective communication with applicants regarding

their administrative registration.

- ✓ How do you handle cases where applicants do not meet the administrative criteria? What support or guidance do you offer them?

This question encourages practitioners to think about how they support applicants who are not initially administratively eligible.

- ✓ In your opinion, what are the most common reasons for applicants being deemed administratively ineligible for RPL, and how can these be addressed in the initial information and guidance phase?

This question helps practitioners identify common barriers to eligibility and consider preventive measures.

- ✓ Reflect on the role of administrative staff in the application screening process. How can their knowledge and skills be enhanced to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this phase?

This question focuses on the continuous improvement of administrative procedures and staff training.

- ✓ How do you ensure that the application screening process is transparent and that applicants understand the criteria and procedures involved?

This question encourages transparency and clear communication throughout the screening process.

- ✓ What role does technology play in your application screening process, and how can it be leveraged to improve efficiency and accuracy?

This question prompts consideration of the use of digital tools and systems to enhance the screening process.

- ✓ Discuss the importance of feedback from applicants regarding the application screening process. How do you collect and use this feedback to make improvements?

This question highlights the value of applicant feedback in refining and improving the screening process.

- ✓ What strategies do you use to handle high volumes of applications while maintaining the quality of the screening process?

This question focuses on managing workloads and ensuring the integrity of the screening process under pressure.

- ✓ Reflect on a real or fake case where an applicant's application was initially deemed ineligible but was later accepted upon further review. What were the key factors that led to this change?

This question helps practitioners consider the importance of thorough review and reconsideration processes.

- ✓ What steps do you take to support applicants in understanding and fulfilling the eligibility requirements?

This question focuses on providing clear guidance and support to applicants throughout the eligibility phase.

- ✓ How do you communicate with applicants whose applications are incomplete or need further information? What follow-up procedures do you have in place?

This question prompts reflection on communication strategies and follow-up procedures to ensure completeness of applications.

- ✓ In what ways can the application screening process be improved to make it more efficient and user-friendly for both applicants and practitioners?

This question encourages thinking about process improvements and user experience.

- ✓ What feedback mechanisms do you have in place to gather input from applicants about the application screening process, and how do you use this feedback to make improvements?

This question highlights the importance of feedback loops and continuous improvement.

- ✓ How do you balance the need for thorough application screening with the need to process applications in a timely manner?

This question focuses on finding the right balance between thoroughness and efficiency in the screening process.

#### 4.6.4. Preparation of the Final Assessment

Phase 4 in short: Putting all the chances on your side for a successful assessment (Table 6)

##### *Rationale – What is this phase about? What happens in this phase?*



Phase 4 is crucial for ensuring that the assessment process is thorough, fair, and aligned with the required standards, e.g., qualification standards, assessment standards or occupational standards. This phase involves detailed planning and preparation of assessment tools and methods to accurately evaluate applicants' learning outcomes. By carefully selecting appropriate assessment methods, developing assessment rubrics, and preparing assessment materials, practitioners ensure that the assessment process is structured and objective. This meticulous preparation is essential for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the RPL process, as it ensures that the final assessments are comprehensive and reflective of the applicants' true abilities. It also ensure reliability from an assessment centre to another.

In addition, this phase includes assessors to ensure they are well-equipped to conduct the assessments consistently and fairly. Assessors must be familiar with the assessment criteria, tools, and procedures to provide an accurate assessment of the applicants' learning outcomes. This must be provided with all the assessment tools (e.g., rubrics) or previous partial assessment of the applicants (e.g., portfolio of competences or written tests, if any). This phase also involves preparing the applicants by providing them with clear information about the assessment process, what to expect, and how to best prepare. Setting clear expectations and offering guidance, makes this phase more able to reduce anxiety and improve applicants' performance during the assessment, leading to more accurate and fair results.

##### *Who are the key actors and what are they expected to do?*





In Phase 4, the key actors include RPL practitioners, especially assessors, and the applicants themselves. RPL practitioners are responsible for designing and preparing the final assessment tools and methods. They must ensure that the assessment criteria are clearly defined and that the tools are capable of accurately measuring the applicants' learning outcomes. There should be training sessions for assessors, ensuring they understand how to apply the assessment criteria consistently and fairly. Additionally, practitioners provide applicants with detailed information and resources to help them prepare for the final assessment.

Assessors play a critical role in this phase as they are responsible for conducting the final assessment in the next phase. They must apply the assessment criteria objectively and consistently to evaluate the applicants' performance accurately. Assessors need to be well-trained and familiar with the assessment tools and methods to ensure the reliability of the results. Applicants, on the other hand, are expected to actively engage in the preparation process. They should review the provided materials, seek clarification if needed, and practice the knowledge and skills that will be assessed. Their proactive involvement in this phase is crucial for their success in the final assessment.

### *What are the benefits of this phase: for the RPL system, for take-up, for the applicants?*



For the RPL system, Phase 4 ensures that the assessment process is well-organised, valid, fair, reliable and authentic. By thoroughly preparing the assessment tools and training assessors, the RPL system can maintain high standards and ensure that the final assessments accurately reflect the applicants' learning outcomes. This phase also helps build credibility and trust in the RPL process, as stakeholders can be confident in the integrity and accuracy of the assessments.

For take-up, a well-prepared and transparent assessment process can encourage more applicants to participate in the RPL process. When applicants know that the assessments are fair, objective, and well-structured, they are more likely to engage with the process. Clear communication and guidance during this phase also help reduce anxiety and build confidence, making the RPL process more accessible and appealing to potential applicants.

For the applicants, Phase 4 provides clear guidance and support to help them prepare effectively for the final assessment. If they understand the assessment criteria and what to expect, applicants can focus their preparation efforts and improve their chances of success. This phase also helps applicants build confidence in their abilities and reduces anxiety, leading to better performance during the assessment. Overall, the thorough preparation and support provided in this phase enhance the applicant experience and increase the likelihood of successful outcomes. The quality of this phase is essential to minimise the dropout rates often witnessed just before the final assessment.

### *Main steps, tasks and tools*



For clarity and simplicity of use, this section is presented in a table. It is a checklist designed for all countries and all practitioners. Therefore, some items may not be relevant in all contexts. It is meant to be a guidance tool for all practitioners not to forget any key step rather than a prescribed list of actions.

Table 6. Phase 4 of the RPL Process: Preparation of the Final Assessment in Detail

Steps of Phase 4	Description	Key Point	Key Point	Alternative Approach	Hindering Factors	Tools and Tricks
<b>4.1. Assessment Planning</b>	Develop a detailed plan for the final assessment process.	Outline the objectives, criteria, and timeline for the final assessment.	Identify key milestones and deadlines to ensure the assessment process runs smoothly.	Use project management software to plan and track assessment activities.	Lack of a clear plan, especially regarding calendar time, can lead to confusion and delays.	Create a detailed assessment plan template that can be customised for each applicant.
<b>4.2. Selection of Assessment Methods</b>	Choose appropriate assessment methods based on the applicant's learning outcomes and evidence, and the country practice.	Select from methods such as practical demonstrations, written tests, or interviews.	Ensure the selected methods align with the learning outcomes being assessed.	Use a combination of assessment methods to get a comprehensive view of the applicant's learning outcomes.	Choosing inappropriate methods can lead to inaccurate assessment results.	Regularly review and update assessment methods to ensure they are relevant and effective.  Brief assessors on alternative assessment methods to confirm initial assessment.
<b>4.3. Preparation of Assessment Tools</b>	Develop and prepare the tools and materials needed for the assessment.	Create assessment rubrics, questionnaires, and checklists tailored to the applicant's field and assessors skills.	Ensure all tools are validated and tested for reliability.	Utilise digital tools and platforms to streamline the preparation and administration of assessments.	Poorly prepared tools can compromise the quality of the assessment.	Pilot test assessment tools with a small group of applicants before full implementation.
<b>4.4. Training of Assessors</b>	Train assessors on the assessment process, tools, and criteria.	Conduct training sessions to ensure assessors understand the assessment criteria and methods.	Provide assessors with a handbook outlining the assessment process and their responsibilities.	Offer online training modules that assessors can complete at their own pace.	Inconsistent training can lead to variability in assessment quality.	Standardise assessor training and provide regular refresher courses.  Do not overload invited assessors

						with written material.
<b>4.5. Applicant Preparation</b>	Prepare applicants for the final assessment.	Provide applicants with detailed information on the assessment process and what to expect.	Offer workshops or one-on-one sessions to help applicants prepare their evidence and practice assessment activities.	Create online resources, such as videos and guides, to help applicants prepare for the assessment.	Applicants may feel anxious or underprepared for the assessment.	Provide clear, supportive communication and offer practice assessments to build confidence.  Fight against last minute dropout.
<b>4.6. Scheduling the Assessment</b>	Arrange a suitable date, time, and location for the assessment.	Coordinate with applicants and assessors to schedule the assessment at a convenient time.	Ensure the assessment environment is prepared and equipped with all necessary materials.	Use online scheduling tools to streamline the coordination of assessment appointments.	Scheduling conflicts can cause delays and inconvenience.	Offer flexible scheduling options and provide reminders to all parties involved.
<b>4.7. Pre-Assessment Briefing</b>	Conduct a briefing session to ensure applicants and assessors are ready.	Hold a briefing session to review the assessment plan, criteria, and procedures.	Answer any last-minute questions and provide final instructions.	Use virtual meeting platforms to conduct the briefing if in-person meetings are not possible.	Last-minute changes or misunderstandings can disrupt the assessment.	Prepare a checklist for the briefing to ensure all important points are covered.

### *Self-assessment and reflexivity*

In order to help practitioners, a short self-assessment is proposed for helping them to reflect on their understanding of this phase. Beyond self-assessment, this list could also be used to engage with peers. There is no good or bad response, and most questions have multiple context-dependent responses:

- ✓ How do you determine the most appropriate assessment methods for different types of prior learning outcomes?  
  
This question encourages practitioners to reflect on the selection of assessment methods based on the nature of the learning outcomes being assessed.
- ✓ What steps do you take to ensure that the assessment criteria are clear and transparent to all applicants?  
  
This question focuses on the importance of clear communication and transparency in the assessment process.
- ✓ How do you involve applicants in the preparation of the final assessment to ensure it is fair and

relevant to their experiences?

This question prompts practitioners to consider ways to engage applicants in the assessment preparation process.

- ✓ Reflect on a time when you had to adapt the assessment process to accommodate a applicant's unique needs, if any. What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?

This question helps practitioners think about real-world application of their skills in adapting assessments

- ✓ What strategies do you use to ensure that the final assessment is comprehensive and covers all necessary learning outcomes?

This question encourages a thorough approach to designing assessments that are both comprehensive and targeted.

- ✓ How do you provide feedback to applicants during the preparation phase to help them improve and succeed in the final assessment?

This question focuses on the role of constructive feedback in preparing applicants for their assessments.

- ✓ What measures do you take to ensure the validity and reliability of the final assessment results?

This question prompts reflection on quality assurance and the integrity of the assessment process.

- ✓ In what ways can technology be used to enhance the preparation and administration of the final assessment?

This question encourages thinking about the integration of digital tools to improve the assessment process.

- ✓ How do you ensure that the assessment environment is supportive and conducive to applicants performing their best?

This question focuses on creating an optimal environment for applicants during the assessment.

- ✓ Discuss the importance of continuous improvement in the assessment process. How do you gather and use feedback to enhance future assessments?

This question highlights the importance of feedback loops and ongoing improvement in the assessment process.

- ✓ How do you ensure alignment between the learning outcomes being assessed and the standards or qualifications frameworks?

This question prompts reflection on ensuring that assessments are relevant and aligned with external standards.

- ✓ What role do stakeholders, such as employers or industry experts, play in the preparation of the final assessment? How do you incorporate their input?

This question encourages consideration of involving external stakeholders in the assessment process, especially employers.

- ✓ How do you balance the need for rigorous assessment with the need to make the process

accessible and manageable for applicants?

This question focuses on finding the right balance between thorough assessment and applicant accessibility.

- ✓ What strategies do you use to ensure that the assessment process is free from bias and that all applicants are assessed fairly?

This question prompts reflection on fairness and impartiality in the assessment process.

- ✓ How do you prepare applicants who may have anxiety or lack confidence about the assessment process? What support mechanisms do you offer?

This question focuses on providing support to applicants who may be anxious or lack confidence.

- ✓ How do you ensure that the assessment tools and methods are updated regularly to reflect current best practices and technological advancements?

This question encourages ongoing review and updating of assessment tools and methods.

- ✓ What training and support do you provide to assessors to ensure they are fully prepared and competent to conduct the final assessments?

This question focuses on the training and development of assessors.

- ✓ Reflect on the role of peer assessments in the RPL process. How do you integrate peer feedback into the final assessment preparation?

This question prompts consideration of the value and integration of peer feedback in the assessment process.

- ✓ How do you handle discrepancies or disputes that arise during the assessment process? What procedures are in place to resolve these issues?

This question focuses on conflict resolution and the procedures for handling disputes in the assessment process, perhaps on the needs of an appeal procedure.

- ✓ In what ways can the preparation phase be tailored to meet the needs of applicants from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds?

This question encourages reflection on inclusivity and how to tailor the assessment preparation to diverse applicants.

#### 4.6.5. Final Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Phase 5 in short: Core of the process, final assessment (Table 7)
-------------------------------------------------------------------

##### *Rationale – What is this phase about? What happens in this phase?*

Phase 5 is the core of the RPL process. It is critical in determining whether applicants have demonstrated the learning outcomes required for formal recognition. This phase involves conducting comprehensive assessments to assess the applicants' learning outcomes against established criteria. The final assessment serves as the definitive measure of whether applicants meet the standards necessary for certification of their learning outcomes toward the targeted qualification (or any other award). Ensuring that these assessments are thorough, objective, and aligned with selected standards is essential for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the RPL process. Accurate and fair

assessments validate the applicants' prior learning outcomes and ensure that only those who meet the standards are awarded recognition.

Moreover, Phase 5 provides an opportunity for applicants to showcase their abilities in a structured and supportive environment. This phase includes practical demonstrations, written tests, and/or other assessment methods tailored to the applicants' fields and experiences (decided in the previous phase). By offering a range of assessment methods, practitioners can obtain a holistic view of the applicants' learning outcomes. This comprehensive assessment not only confirms the applicants' readiness for certification of her/him learning outcomes but also highlights any areas where further development may be needed. The final assessment phase is a crucial step in ensuring that the RPL process is rigorous, fair, and reflective of true learning outcomes.

### *Who are the key actors and what are they expected to do?*

In Phase 5, the key actors also include RPL practitioners, and mainly assessors, and the applicants. RPL practitioners are responsible for organising and overseeing the assessment process. They ensure that the assessments are conducted according to established criteria and standards. Practitioners must coordinate with applicants and invited assessors to schedule assessments, provide the necessary materials and tools, and address any logistical issues. They also ensure that the assessment environment is conducive to a fair and objective assessment of applicants' learning outcomes.

Assessors play a pivotal role in this phase as they are responsible for conducting the assessments and evaluating the applicants' performance. They must apply the assessment criteria consistently and objectively to ensure accurate and fair results. Assessors need to be well-trained and familiar with the assessment tools and methods to provide reliable assessment. Applicants, on the other hand, are expected to actively participate in the assessments, demonstrating their learning outcomes. They must prepare thoroughly and engage with the assessment process to showcase their learning outcomes effectively. Their performance in this phase is crucial in determining their eligibility for a qualification.

### *What are the benefits of this phase: for the RPL system, for take-up, for the applicants?*

For the RPL system, Phase 5 ensures that the assessment process is rigorous and objective, maintaining high standards for qualification. By conducting thorough and fair assessments, the RPL system can validate the learning outcomes of applicants accurately. This phase also helps maintain the credibility and integrity of the RPL process, ensuring that only qualified applicants receive recognition. A robust final assessment process also enhances the reputation of the RPL system, building trust among stakeholders.

For take-up, a clear and fair final assessment process can encourage more applicants to engage with the RPL system. When applicants see that the assessments are well-organised, objective, and aligned with standards (e.g., industry standards), they are more likely to participate. Transparent communication and support during this phase also help reduce anxiety and build confidence, making the RPL process more accessible and appealing to potential applicants.

For the applicants, Phase 5 provides an opportunity to demonstrate their learning outcomes in a structured environment. This phase offers clear criteria and expectations, helping applicants prepare effectively and perform to the best of their abilities. Successful completion of the final assessment leads to formal recognition of their prior learning outcomes, which can enhance their career prospects and personal growth. The thorough and supportive assessment process also helps applicants identify any areas for further development, contributing to their continuous improvement and professional advancement.

**Main steps, tasks and tools**

For clarity and simplicity of use, this section is presented in a table. It is a checklist designed for all countries and all practitioners. Therefore, some items may not be relevant in all contexts. It is meant to be a guidance tool for all practitioners not to forget any key step rather than a prescribe list of actions.

**Table 7. Phase 5 of the RPL Process: Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Detail**

Steps of Phase 5	Description	Key Point	Key Point	Alternative Approach	Hindering Factors	Tools and Tricks
<b>5.1. Conducting the Assessment</b>	Execute the planned assessment activities.	Conduct practical demonstrations where applicants showcase their skills in a real-world scenario.	Administer written tests to evaluate theoretical knowledge.	Use online assessment platforms for remote applicants to participate in the assessment.	Technical issues or applicant anxiety can affect performance.	Ensure all technical equipment is tested beforehand and provide a calm environment to ease applicant nerves.
<b>5.2. Evaluating Evidence</b>	Assess the submitted evidence against the criteria (e.g., qualification standards).	Review work samples, portfolios, and other submitted documents to verify learning outcomes.	Cross-check evidence with the assessment criteria to ensure all requirements are met.	Use a rubric to standardise the assessment process and ensure consistency.	Subjectivity can lead to biased assessments.	Train assessors on using rubrics and provide calibration sessions to align assessment standards.
<b>5.3. Scoring and Grading</b>	Assign scores or grades based on the assessment results.	Use a scoring system to assign points for each learning outcome demonstrated by the applicant.	Convert scores into grades or levels of achievement.	Implement a double-marking system where two assessors independently score the assessments.	Inconsistencies in scoring can affect the fairness of the assessment.	Establish clear grading guidelines and conduct regular assessor meetings to discuss scoring standards.  Keep track of the scores to establish a transcript.
<b>5.4. Assessment Feedback</b>	Provide detailed feedback to applicants on their performance.	Prepare written feedback highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.	Discuss the feedback with the applicant in a post-assessment meeting.	Use a feedback form to ensure all relevant points are covered systematically.	Negative feedback may discourage applicants.	Frame feedback constructively, emphasising positive aspects and providing actionable suggestions.

						for improvement.
<b>5.5. Documentation and Record Keeping</b>	Maintain accurate records of the assessment process and outcomes.	Record scores, feedback, and assessment outcomes in a central database.	Ensure all documentation is securely stored and easily accessible for future reference.	Use digital record-keeping systems to organise and store assessment data.	Poor documentation can lead to loss of important information.	Implement regular audits and backups to maintain the integrity of assessment records.
<b>5.6. Decision</b>	Decide whether applicant passes or fails after completion of the final assessment.	Explain where there is room for improvement to successful applicants.	Explain the reason for failure to unsuccessful applicants.	Delay the discussion about the final decision to avoid unexpected reactions.	Unclear communication may create tensions.	Establish a rather formal protocol to inform applicants.
<b>5.7. Appeal Process</b>	Establish a process for applicants to appeal assessment decisions.	Inform applicants of their right to appeal and the steps involved.	Review the appeal request and conduct a re-assessment if necessary.	Set up an independent appeals panel to review and decide on appeals.	Appeals can be time-consuming and resource-intensive.	Streamline the appeal process with clear guidelines and timelines to ensure efficient handling.  Accept appeal only for technical issues, not in relation to the final decision.

### *Self-assessment and reflexivity*

In order to help practitioners, a short self-assessment is proposed for helping them to reflect on their understanding of this phase. Beyond self-assessment, this list could also be used to engage with peers. There is no good or bad response, and most questions have multiple context-dependent responses:

- ✓ What methods do you use to ensure that the final assessment is comprehensive and accurately reflects the applicants' learning outcomes?  
This question encourages practitioners to think about how to create a thorough and accurate assessment process.
- ✓ What methods do you use to ensure that the final assessment is transparent to applicants?  
This question encourages practitioners to think about how to create the best possible conditions for full transparency of the assessment process.
- ✓ How do you address any discrepancies or disputes that arise during the final assessment?



This question focuses on conflict resolution and maintaining fairness during the assessment process.

- ✓ What strategies do you use to provide constructive feedback to applicants after the final assessment?

This question prompts practitioners to consider how to offer valuable feedback that can help applicants understand their performance and areas for improvement.

- ✓ How do you ensure the consistency and reliability of the assessment results across different assessors, applicants and regions?

This question encourages reflection on standardisation and reliability in the assessment process.

- ✓ How do you ensure the fairness and authenticity of the assessment process?

This question encourages reflection on the foundations of the assessment process.

- ✓ What role do digital tools and technologies play in the final assessment process? How can they be used to enhance the assessment? Are they realistic?

This question focuses on the integration of technology to improve the assessment process.

- ✓ How do you involve external stakeholders, such as industry experts or employers, in the final assessment process?

This question prompts consideration of external validation and relevance of the assessment to real-world standards.

- ✓ Reflect on a time when a applicant did not meet the expected outcomes in the final assessment. How did you handle this situation, and what support did you provide to the applicant?

This question helps practitioners think about supporting applicants who struggle and ensuring they have opportunities to improve.

- ✓ What measures do you take to ensure that the final assessment environment is conducive to applicants performing their best?

This question focuses on creating an optimal assessment environment that supports applicant success.

- ✓ How do you ensure transparency and clarity in the assessment criteria and process for applicants?

This question encourages practitioners to think about clear communication and transparency in the assessment process.

- ✓ What continuous improvement practices do you implement to enhance the final assessment process over time?

This question prompts reflection on ongoing improvements and updates to the assessment process to maintain its effectiveness and relevance.

#### 4.6.6. Certification (of Learning Outcomes)

Phase 6 in short: Decision and awarding of a qualification (or any other award) to successful applicants (Table 8)

##### *Rationale – What is this phase about? What happens in this phase?*

Phase 6 is the final one of the RPL process where applicants' learning outcomes are formally recognised through qualification. This phase is crucial as it provides official validation of the applicants' prior learning outcomes, which can significantly enhance their career and educational opportunities. The qualification process ensures that applicants who have successfully demonstrated their learning outcomes receive a formal acknowledgment that is widely recognised and respected. This official recognition not only benefits the applicants but also upholds the credibility and integrity of the RPL system, ensuring that the standards of qualification are consistently maintained.

Additionally, this phase involves not only issuing qualifications (or other awards such as credits toward a qualification, exemptions, labour market certificates) but also ensuring that all records are accurately maintained and securely stored. This meticulous documentation is essential for future verification and for maintaining a robust system of record-keeping. Providing applicants with qualifications (or other awards) and detailed feedback on their performance reinforces the transparency and fairness of the RPL process. It also includes follow-up activities to support applicants in their future endeavours and ensure they are aware of further learning or career development opportunities. Therefore, Phase 6 represents both the conclusion of the current RPL process and the beginning of new opportunities for certified applicants, in life in general and in the labour market in particular.

##### *Who are the key actors and what are they expected to do?*

In Phase 6, the key actors are RPL practitioners, qualification authorities, and the applicants themselves. RPL practitioners are responsible for preparing and issuing the qualification documents, ensuring that all relevant details such as learning outcomes possessed and levels of qualification are accurately recorded. They must verify the assessment results to ensure that all standards have been met before issuing qualifications. Practitioners also manage the notification and distribution process, ensuring that applicants receive their certificates promptly and that all records are meticulously maintained for future reference.

Qualification authorities play a vital role in overseeing the entire qualification process, ensuring that it aligns with national standards. They may be involved in auditing the certification procedures to guarantee compliance and integrity. Applicants, on the other hand, are the recipients of the qualification. They are expected to review the feedback provided, understand their achievements, and use the qualification to further their career or educational goals. Applicants may also provide feedback on the qualification process, helping to improve future iterations of the RPL system.

##### *What are the benefits of this phase: for the RPL system, for take-up, for the applicants?*

For the RPL system, Phase 6 solidifies the legitimacy and credibility of the entire RPL process by formally recognising applicants' learning outcomes. This phase ensures that all successful applicants receive a widely acknowledged qualification, which enhances the trust and reliability of the RPL system. Meticulous record-keeping and verification processes also ensure that the RPL system can efficiently manage and authenticate qualifications, contributing to its overall robustness and effectiveness.

For take-up, the qualification provided in Phase 6 is a strong motivator for potential applicants. Knowing that their prior learning outcomes can be officially recognised and documented encourages more individuals to participate in the RPL process. The promise of a formal, recognised qualification

adds significant value to the RPL process, making it more attractive and credible to potential applicants.

For the applicants, Phase 6 provides the ultimate reward for their efforts throughout the RPL process. Receiving a qualification validates their knowledge and skills, opening doors to new career opportunities and further education. This official recognition can significantly boost their confidence and professional standing. Additionally, the detailed feedback and follow-up support provided during this phase help applicants identify further development opportunities, ensuring continuous growth and advancement in their chosen fields.

**Main steps, tasks and tools**

For clarity and simplicity of use, this section is presented in a table. It is a checklist designed for all countries and all practitioners. Therefore, some items may not be relevant in all contexts. It is meant to be a guidance tool for all practitioners not to forget any key step rather than a prescribe list of actions.

**Table 8. Phase 6 of the RPL Process: Certification (of Learning Outcomes) in Detail**

Steps of Phase 6	Description	Key Point	Key Point	Alternative Approach	Hinderin g Factors	Tools and Tricks
<b>6.1. Preparation of Qualification Documents</b>	Prepare the necessary documents for certification (qualification or other award).	Compile a list of applicants who have successfully completed the RPL process.	Prepare qualifications , including details of the qualifications achieved (e.g., grades, level).	Use a template to standardise the preparation of qualification documents.	Errors in documents can delay the qualification process.	Double-check all details and use a checklist to ensure accuracy.
<b>6.2. Verification of Assessment Results</b>	Verify that all assessment results meet the required standards.	Cross-check assessment results with the qualification criteria to ensure all criteria of the standard are met.	Verify the authenticity of assessment results with the assessors.	Use a digital system to streamline the verification process.	Incomplete or inaccurate assessment records can hinder verification.	Maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment database.
<b>6.3. Issuance of Certificates</b>	Issue qualifications (or other awards) to applicants who have met the qualification requirements.	Print and sign certificates for eligible applicants.	Include specific details such as the learning outcomes possessed and the level of qualification.	Offer digital certificates that can be easily shared and verified online.  With QR code linking to the NQF.	Manual processes can be time-consuming and prone to errors.	Automate the issuance process to ensure efficiency and accuracy.
<b>6.4. Notification to Applicants</b>	Notify applicants of their successful qualification.	Send an official letter, SMS or email to inform applicants of	Provide details on how and when they will receive	Use an online portal where applicants can check their	Delayed notifications can cause uncertainty	Ensure timely notifications with automated

		their successful qualification.	their qualification.	qualification status.	and frustration.	email systems.
<b>6.5. Distribution of Certificates</b>	Distribute the certificates to the applicants.	Arrange a formal ceremony to distribute certificates to applicants. Public recognition of achievements is part of the communication strategy	Send certificates by email or by post to those who cannot attend in person. Invite stakeholders, including employers and family members, to the award ceremony	Provide options for applicants to download and print their certificates from an online portal. Hold a virtual award ceremony for applicants who cannot attend in person.	Logistical challenges can delay the distribution of certificates. Planning and organising an award ceremony can be resource-intensive.	Plan the distribution process well in advance and provide multiple options for receiving certificates. Collaborate with stakeholders to share the cost and responsibilities of organising the ceremony. Fund raise.
<b>6.6. Record Keeping</b>	Maintain accurate records of issued qualifications (or other awards).	Record all issued certificates in a central database for future reference.	Ensure that records include details such as the applicant's name, qualification, and date of issuance.	Use a secure digital system for record keeping to prevent loss or damage.	Inadequate record-keeping can lead to difficulties in verifying qualifications in the future.	Regularly update and backup records to maintain their integrity.
<b>6.7. Follow-up with Applicants</b>	Conduct follow-up activities with certified applicants.	Send a follow-up survey to gather feedback on the RPL process. Carry out research, hire postdoctoral scholars.	Provide information on further learning and development opportunities.	Create an alumni network to keep certified applicants engaged and informed.	Lack of follow-up can lead to missed opportunities for feedback and improvement.	Implement a systematic follow-up process to stay connected with certified applicants.

### *Self-assessment and reflexivity*

In order to help practitioners, a short self-assessment is proposed for helping them to reflect on their understanding of this phase. Beyond self-assessment, this list could also be used to engage with peers. There is no good or bad response, and most questions have multiple context-dependent responses:

- ✓ What methods do you use to ensure that the awarded qualification accurately reflect the learning outcomes and achievements of the applicants?

This question encourages practitioners to think about how to create thorough and accurate qualification documents (qualification) or use existing ones.

- ✓ What are the pros and cons for rubber stamping the awarded qualification with the

mention “RPL”, indicating that the qualification was achieved in the RPL system? What would be ideal in your country?

This question focuses on the issue of equity among the owners of a qualification from the formal education and training system or from the RPL system.

- ✓ How do you ensure that the qualifications awarded after an RPL process are sent to successful applicants in a minimum of time?

This question encourages reflection on the speed of the qualification process.

- ✓ What role do digital tools and technologies play in the qualification process? How can they be used to enhance the qualification?

This question focuses on the integration of technology to improve the qualification process.

- ✓ What continuous improvement practices do you implement to enhance the qualification process over time?

This question prompts reflection on ongoing improvements and updates to the qualification process to maintain its effectiveness and relevance.

#### **4.7. Quality Assurance for Pilots – A Checklist**

As has already become clear, the development of guidelines for RPL is at the heart of the quality assurance process. As has also become clear, it is a job that must be done by a working group made up of stakeholders in the RPL system, a task force as it were.

However, in order for any African country to continue on the path of pilot testing, it may be useful to propose some structuring elements of the quality assurance approach, even if the working group on quality assurance on the subject of RPL may not have been appointed yet. The following are proven elements:

- ✓ The qualification after an RPL assessment – or alternatives, such credits or partial qualification – should be awarded only for learning outcomes and not for experience. The duration of the experience is not always a good indicator of the quality of learning outcomes.
- ✓ RPL assessment should be based on qualification standards or assessment standards (existing or developed specifically for the RPL system).
- ✓ It is the applicants who must decide on the qualification they aimed for, after a phase of information, guidance and advice of good quality. All this is transparent and made public.
- ✓ The qualification awarded after the RPL process must be appropriate to the context in which it is awarded and recognised.
- ✓ The policies, procedures, and criteria applied to the assessment, including the disposition for appeal, should be fully disclosed and prominently available to all parties involved in the assessment process.
- ✓ All RPL practitioners involved in the RPL assessment must follow and receive appropriate training and ongoing professional development for the functions they perform and the

responsibilities they have.

- ✓ Assessment approaches should be monitored, revised, evaluated, and reviewed regularly to reflect changes in the needs being met, the purposes being met, and the state of the art of assessment.

Obviously, many, if not all, of these recommendations could form part of the final guidelines as well.

## 5. Case studies from African countries

This section provides cases and examples of RPL policies in African countries, their objectives, legal base, phases and concrete application. The cases of this sample are: 1. Cabo Verde; 2. SADC countries: Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### 5.1. Cabo Verde

In Cabo Verde RPL is designated “RVCC” – Recognition Validation and Certification of Competences. This is the term used in this section.

#### 5.1.1. Link of RVCC with the NQF of Cabo Verde

The Decree-Law Nr 54/2014 of 22 September, on RVCC, enunciates the policy and conceptual underpinnings of the promotion of validation of competences acquired in all contexts of learning. Social and labour market inclusion, economic productivity, valorisation of all types of learning and reinforcement of flexible lifelong learning paths of citizens are the benefits expected from effective implementation of this policy.

*“People acquire, with their life experience, namely in professional activities, knowledge, and competences relevant for the exercise of many activities. Those competences can and shall be formally certified, and, if necessary, complemented with training adjusted to individual needs, thereby promoting access to higher levels of qualification.”*

Source: Decree-Law Nr 54/2014

Recognition of competences acquired in different contexts of learning and life is one of the statutory components of the SNQ and is organically linked with:

NQF	Through the application of the learning outcomes approach. The primacy of learning outcomes in designing and assessing qualifications enable the access to qualifications by validation and certification of acquired competences.
CNQ	Through the right to acquire any of the registered qualifications via processes of recognition, validation, and certification of acquired competences, in accordance with the legislative-regulatory framework.
Individual register of qualifications and competences	Registers individual acquired competences and qualifications and identifies the competences missing to the completion of a certain qualification, thereby contributes to build individual trajectories of adequate training. Currently in the process of legislative regulation.

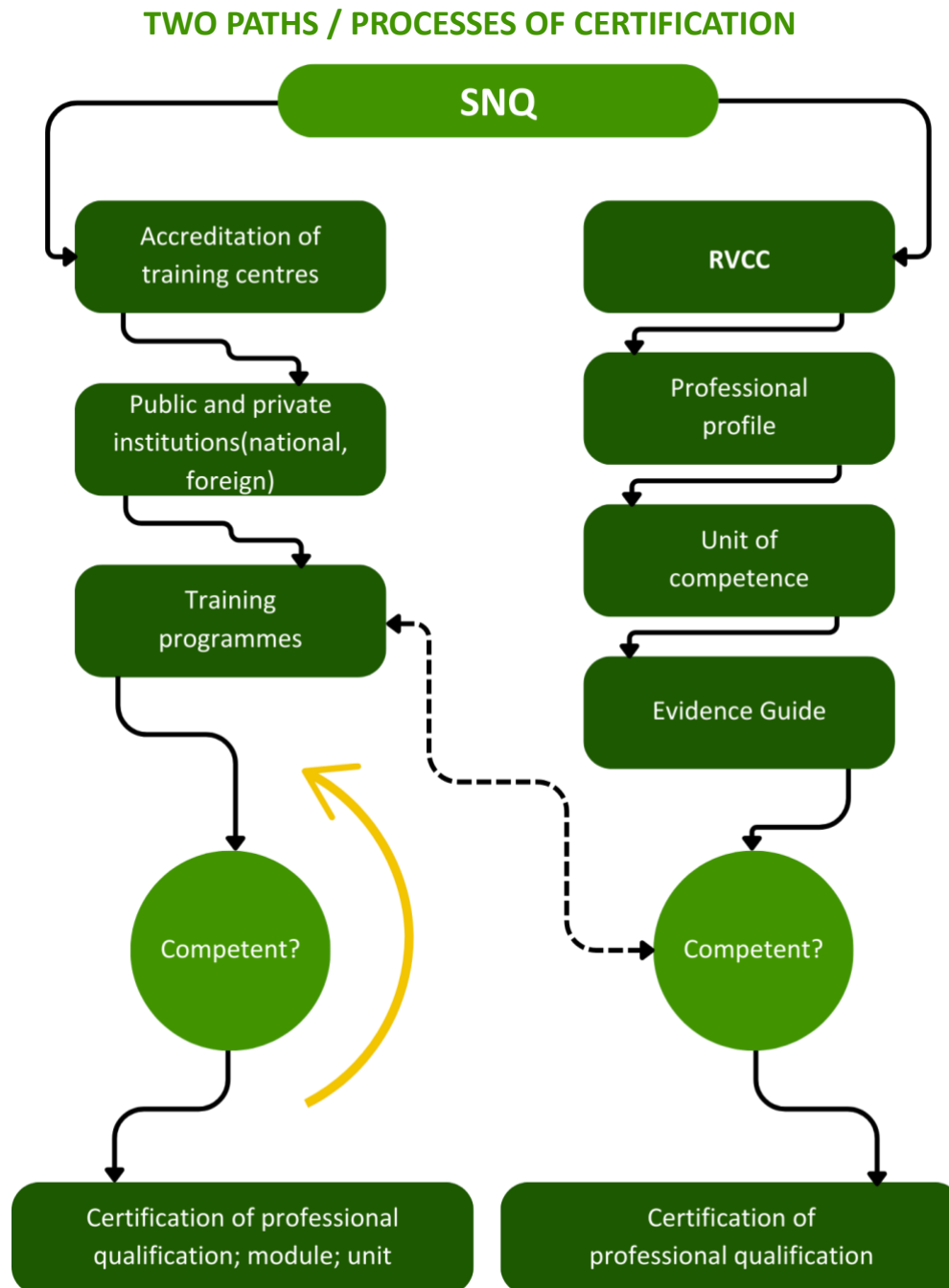
#### 5.1.2. Organisation and implementation of RVCC

##### Organisation

RVCC is defined in Article 3 of the Decree-Law Nr 54/2014, as the formal process enabling individuals to obtain the recognition, validation, and certification of his/her competences, independently of the ways and contexts in which these competences were developed.

The UC-SNQ website provides brief information about [the RVCC and its organisation](#).

**Figure 1: Different paths to a common goal – certification of competences within the National Qualifications System.**



Source: UC-SNQ: Presentation at ACQF webinar of 8 May 2020

**Main features of RVCC as a system:**

- RVCC focuses on professional certification (RVCC Pro) and currently applies only to qualifications included in the CNQ. In higher education RVCC processes do not apply; however, reflection has already begun which could lead to decision-making and measures to support an RVCC approach adapted to higher education.



- **Target group:** Individuals over 25 years of age with at least 5 years of professional/employment experience.
- **Governance of the system:** UC-SNQ coordinates the organisation, functioning and elaboration of referential for professional certification and assessment standards. UC-SNQ supervises the certifying entities, monitors, and provides them with technical and methodological support.
- **Accreditation:** Only accredited certifying entities can provide services of the RVCC system, in accordance with the legal requirements. Substantive experience in professional training and in the targeted professional families are among the key criteria of accreditation of certifying entities. The accreditation can be revoked under circumstances of breach of the legal requirements and obligations, low performance or at request of the entity.

RVCC is a process based on phases, which share similarities with the phases of Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning defined by the EU Recommendation of 2012.

In Cabo Verde the phases of RVCC are defined and organised to allow candidates to grow in awareness and preparedness to the assessment and certification. Candidates can develop requisite competences through modular training, if needed to complete the full qualification.

**Stages of the RVCC process in Cabo Verde (Article 8 of Decree-Law No. 54/2014):**

<p><b>Phase 1:</b> Information and guidance – first orientation to the candidates on the RVCC process and its instruments, and the candidate is advised on the feasibility in each case. This step starts directly at the certifying entity.</p>	<p><b>Phase 2:</b> Recognition of competences – candidates identify the knowledge and competences acquired throughout life, applying a methodology of <i>Bilan de competences</i> (Skills Audit). Main outputs: Individual professional portfolio, assessor’s report identifying the candidates’ competences by units of competence and the professional activities to be validated from the provided evidence.</p>
<p><b>Phase 3:</b> Validation of competences – evaluation of the competences in correspondence with the professional profiles of the CNQ. Based on evaluation instruments adapted to the nature of the competence, for example, technical interview, practical examination. The jury comprises an assessor, an evaluator, and a representative of the enterprise sector (independent evaluator). Output: Deliberation of the jury on the validation process.</p>	<p><b>Phase 4:</b> Certification of competences – the jury certifies that the assessed and validated competences have a formal value in relation to a predefined referential. In case of partial certification, the assessor and the evaluator propose a personal qualification plan, encompassing the units of competence, which were not certified. With this personal plan, the candidate has access to an adequate modality of training or of self-training in the frame of the SNQ. At the conclusion of the training programme, the candidate resumes the RVCC process.</p>

### Documents provided by applicants

- Curriculum vitae to attest to the consistency of the candidate's professional experience in the RVCC process.
- Statements by employers to confirm the exercise of professional activity for the minimum time required.
- Declarations concerning the constitution of economic activity in the case of professionals who conduct their professional activity on their own account.
- Other means of proof considered necessary by the entity responsible for the development of the RVCC process.

### Implementation

In Cabo Verde, the RVCC is in the initial phase of implementation. In 2022, pilot projects of RVCC were started in qualifications of levels 3, 4 and 5 of three professional families.

In 2020-2021, UC-SNQ developed additional tools support of RVCC pilot implementation, e.g.: RVCC standards and evaluation instruments were developed for qualifications of the pilot phase and were included in the CNQ.

### Example:

- Professional qualification "Reception in accommodation": [https://snq.cv/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HRT006\\_4-RECEPCAO-EM-ALOJAMENTOS.pdf](https://snq.cv/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HRT006_4-RECEPCAO-EM-ALOJAMENTOS.pdf)
- RVCC standard for this same professional qualification: [https://snq.cv/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Referencial-RVCC-Pro\\_Rece%C3%A7%C3%A3o-em-Alojamentos.pdf](https://snq.cv/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Referencial-RVCC-Pro_Rece%C3%A7%C3%A3o-em-Alojamentos.pdf)
- The RVCC standards published in the CNQ are (access: 27/02/2023):

<a href="#">HRT003/4:</a> Cooking	<a href="#">HRT003/3:</a> Service of food and drinks	<a href="#">HRT004/5:</a> Tourism Guide	<a href="#">HRT006/4:</a> Reception in hotels / accommodations	<a href="#">IMA006/3:</a> Plumbing and installation in building	<a href="#">AGE002/4:</a> Administrative Services and Customer care
					

### Overview of main achievements of the pilot implementation

- RVCC is governed by a specific manual that can be consulted.
- In 2022, the RVCC trial was launched in three professional qualifications: Plumbing and Building Installation (level 3), Food Services (level 3), Administrative and customer service services and users (level 4). Result: certified 48 candidates.
- The second pilot experience began in 2022, in the professional family of Hospitality Restaurant and Tourism, with RVCC for the following professional qualifications: food and beverage services (level 3), confectioner (level 3), kitchen (level 4), tour guide (level 5), hotel receptionist (level 4) with a total of 118 enrolled in the process in early 2023. The target set for 2023 is to certify 400 candidates.
- About 50 RVCC specialists are trained, namely: advisors, and assessors for the implementation of the RVCC process.

- The process is being implemented in accredited centers such as the School of Hospitality, CERMI and others.
- The cost of the RVCC process is \$29,000 (Cabo Verde) per applicant (about €262). Currently it is being co-funded by the candidates and government.

**High demand for RVCC requires more resources**

Statistical data from September to December 2022 published in the GAO report indicate that demand for RVCC has exceeded the provision of RVCC services. Thus, by September of the total of 463 candidates, only 4% (18 people) reached the certification. These figures are not yet final, as there are new processes of the 2nd pilot experience in progress (Table 7) and the final data until December 2022 to consider.

UC-SNQ and RVCC partner entities are aware of the need to streamline and allocate more resources to the implementation of RVCC processes with registered candidates. It is expected that the involvement of interested private companies, including entities in the hotel restaurant and tourism sector can provide important technical and material support to practical evaluations, facilitate processes, and encourage candidates to devote themselves to the activities and procedures of the evaluation and certification process.

**Table 9: Number of candidates for the RVCC, and of professional qualification certificates awarded. By age and gender - January to September 2022**

	25-35 years F	25-35 years M	36+ years F	36+ years M	M	F	Total
<b>Number of Candidates</b>	181	174	56	52	237	226	463
<b>Certificates of professional qualifications</b>	0	5	1	12	17	1	18
<b>% of Certification</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>
<b>Source: IEPF, EHTCV</b>							

Source: GAO Report. Page 12.

**5.1.3. Higher education**

RVCC options and measures do not yet exist in practice in higher education. But reflection on this matter has begun. The legal framework is not yet in place. In the meantime, the credit system may be the main tool to support RVCC in higher education, as foreseen by existing legislation:

- Recognition of prior learning: educational institutions recognise, through the credit system, professional skills and post-secondary training of candidates and students enrolled, through special access modalities, which must be defined in a specific legal text.

**5.1.4. Legal, political, and technical basis of RVCC in Cabo Verde**

**Main legal Act:**

- ✓ Decree-Law Nr 54/2014 of 22 September. Regulates the system of recognition, validation and certification of professional competences acquired and developed throughout life, namely in the context of work. At: <https://kiosk.incv.cv/1.1.56.1903/>

**Other relevant legislation:**

- ✓ Decree-Law Nr 13/2018 of 7 December. Revises the Bases of the Education System. At: [https://minedu.gov.cv/media/orientacao/2020/10/06/Decreto-legislativo\\_n%C2%BA\\_13\\_2018\\_LBSE.pdf](https://minedu.gov.cv/media/orientacao/2020/10/06/Decreto-legislativo_n%C2%BA_13_2018_LBSE.pdf)
- ✓ Decree-Law Nr 4/2018 of 10 January, Establishes the new legal regime of the SNQ. At: <https://kiosk.incv.cv/V/2018/1/10/1.1.4.2461/>
- ✓ Decree-Law Nr 7/2018 of 7 February, Regulates the organisation and functioning of the UC-SNQ. At: <http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Regula-o-Funcionamento-UC-SNQ.pdf>
- ✓ Joint Ordinance Nr 9/2020 of 17 February, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education, Establishes the structure and organisation of the CNQ. At: [http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo\\_20-02-2020\\_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf](http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo_20-02-2020_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf)
- ✓ Joint Ordinance Nr 10/2020 of 17 February, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education, Regulates the NQF. At: [http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo\\_20-02-2020\\_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf](http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo_20-02-2020_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf)
- ✓ UC-SNQ, SNQ, Procedures Guide – Methodology for Elaboration of Professional Qualifications. Unpublished.

### **Methodological guidance**

- ✓ UC-SNQ, Guide supporting the operationalisation of processes of professional RVCC, March 2016. At: <http://docplayer.com.br/65626641-Operacionalizacao-de-processos-de-rvcc-profissional.html>
- ✓ UC-SNQ, Process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Professional Competences, March 2013. At: <http://docplayer.com.br/49553365-Processo-de-reconhecimento-validacao-e-certificacao-de-competencias-profissionais.html>

## **5.2. RPL in the context of Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States**

### **5.2.1. In the context of SADC**

This section presents six SADC country cases of RPL implementation, illustrating similarities in objectives, concepts, and principles; and diversity in certain aspects of implementation. These country cases are: Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **5.2.2. At regional level**

SADC adopted in 2016 Guidelines for RPL as recommendation for the member states.

These Guidelines propose a six-stage process, as follows:

- 1 Information and Guidance
- 2 Administrative registration
- 3 Eligibility
- 4 Assessment
- 5 Appeal
- 6 Certification

### 5.2.3. At national level

In the SADC many countries have or are adopting RPL policies and guidelines and most importantly, advancing with delivery of RPL services. RPL systems and experiences are at different stages of development and consolidation, and a few examples can be mentioned:

- Malawi has adopted in 2018 a set of RPL documents to facilitate implementation, including Guidelines, Procedure Manual, Assessors Guide, Candidate Guidelines and Application Form. RPL is more active in the TVET sector.
- Mauritius (MQA) amended the RPL Guidelines in 2016 and RPL services for individuals are accessible free of charge.
- Mozambique (ANEP) adopted the RPL (SRCA) legal act and the RPL Regulations in 2021 and started implementation with pilot actions to train and certify RPL professionals, certify RPL centres and deploy RPL processes for individuals. Information on the RPL legal texts, the Methodology supporting implementation and the list of accredited RPL Centres is accessible on [ANEP's website](#).
- Namibia is one the first SADC countries to adopt the RPL Policy, in 2010.
- Seychelles approved and implements the [National Policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning \(2017\)](#), supported by [National Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning \(2017\)](#).
- South Africa has amended the Policy and Criteria for RPL and has substantial and long-standing experience, technical expertise and data to be shared.
- Zambia has adopted the Policy and Criteria for RPL (ZAQA, 2016). In TVET implementation is led by TEVETA for several sectors, such as in mining, tourism, agriculture and construction sector. In higher education RPL is applied to provide exemptions for further studies.
- Zimbabwe adopted a set of RPL documents to facilitate implementation, including Guidelines, Procedure Manual, Assessors Guide, Candidate Guidelines and Application Form from as early as 1984 through the Manpower Planning and Development Act [28:02] amended in 2021. RPL is more active in the TVET sector. University Education does have Mature Entry as a form of RPL but the TVET Sector has a more fascinating skills assessment system.

### 5.2.4. Country cases in the SADC context

Given the importance of RPL in the socio-economic context of SADC, this brief overview is complemented by the country cases, which illustrate common goals, contextualization, and the remarkable effort at national level to develop, reinforce and implement such fundamental policies as RPL.

The country cases presented in this section are: Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Main used sources: information, legal acts, reports published on the websites of the respective National Qualifications Authorities, TVET authorities, and technical notes drafted by national experts.

ACQF-II expresses sincere gratitude to Mr Ramesh Ramdass and MQA team (Mauritius), Mr Aurélio Leopoldo Santos and Mr Ida Alvarinho (Mozambique), Ms Fiona Ernesta and SQA team (Seychelles), Ms Nadia Starr and SAQA Team (South Africa), Ms Mercy Ngoma and Mr Fidelis Cheelo and ZAQA team (Zambia), and Mr. Wisdom Simon Mtisi (Zimbabwe) for the general information, insights and specific details shared on RPL in the respective countries.

## Mauritius



The implementation of RPL rests with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA) as per the provisions of the Mauritius Qualifications Act 2001 which is “to recognise and validate competencies for purposes of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems”. For certification, RPL considers both recognition of accredited learning and recognition of prior experiential learning. RPL provides an alternative route for earning a valued qualification. RPL is free of charge for candidates.

The NQF has been the main vehicle through which RPL has been promoted in Mauritius. The Framework explicitly aims to recognise all learning achievements regardless of the specific context where they were gained, including prior learning. It does so by establishing a single national point of reference for RPL, learning outcomes, alternative pathways to qualifications and a more flexible and integrated system of qualifications. The Authority’s role is to encourage the development of processes for recognising prior learning and promoting its co-ordination and harmonisation.

The [Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines](#), amended in 2016, define the goals, scope and phases of RPL.

The potential benefits of RPL are not limited to the applicants.

- Employers, for instance, may benefit from RPL for cost-efficiency reasons. It allows employers to advance workers in which they have invested over the years and who possess the relevant skills and experience for a job.
- Governments, on the other hand, can use RPL to improve the educational profile of their workforce and help applicants expand their employment prospects. If RPL is integrated into the overall education and training systems, it will positively impact the labour market, as well as countries’ economies, and society.

### RPL process in Mauritius - The National RPL Framework

Central to the present Mauritian RPL model, starting from its conception to its implementation, reside the different phases namely the pre-application, pre-screening, facilitation, and assessment stages.

**Table 10: RPL process in Mauritius - phases**

Stage one	Pre-application	Candidate is provided information about the process of RPL
Stage two	Pre-screening	Candidate submits its application and identifies the qualification against which RPL will be claimed
Stage three	Facilitation	A facilitator guides the RPL candidate in the preparation of the portfolio
Stage four	Assessment	The candidate is assessed against the unit standards of the selected qualifications

RPL is proposed against unit standard based qualifications. Different sets of RPL strategies are proposed for levels 2-3, levels 4-5 and for levels 6. RPL, at this stage, is limited to NQF level 6.

These strategies are linked to a specific target group thus further increasing the reliability and validity of the system and thereby enhancing trust. The guiding principle throughout the RPL process is fairness to the candidate and continuous learning.

## Mozambique



In 2020 and especially in 2021 Mozambique made progress in the establishment of the System of Recognition of Acquired Competences (SRCA), which corresponds to RPL. The Decree and the Regulation supporting implementation were approved in 2021 and a pilot project carried out - with 25 candidates certified, RPL professionals trained and four RPL centre accredited. Information on the RPL legal texts, the Methodology supporting implementation and the list of accredited RPL Centres is accessible on [ANEP's website](#).

Among the four modalities of professional training, Law no.18/2018 on the national education system acknowledges the modality of extra-institutional training, that is, learning acquired outside of training institutions and schools. In complement, the Law on vocational education no. 6/2016 (Articles 15 and 16) acknowledges the possibility of recognising and attributing value to learning acquired outside of formal training settings (institutions), under the condition that such learning is aligned with the competence standards of the national Framework of professional qualifications ([Quadro Nacional de Qualificações Profissionais - QNQP](#)).

The QNQP validates and certifies learning obtained outside of training institutions and enables the access to regular courses offered by the formal training system. With the adoption and publication of [Decree no. 58/2021](#) of 17 August 2021, the new SRCA received legal status, and the supporting SRCA Regulation has been adopted. The SRCA applies to vocational education and training, not to other sub-systems of the national education system.

The objectives of the SRCA include:

- ✓ regulate and facilitate certification of skills and competences from lifelong learning;
- ✓ increase employability of the population, by making visible and formalising skills and competences from lifelong learning;
- ✓ support further training for individuals who dropped out of education and training;
- ✓ social and formal recognition of skills and competences from lifelong learning;
- ✓ increase supply of qualified and certified professionals;
- ✓ support development of professional careers and progression within organisations and service.

The SRCA's principles and mechanisms apply to all processes of recognition of competences acquired (RCA) through lifelong learning, in contexts of work, and non-formal and informal learning.

Main features of the SRCA:

- ✓ Eligible population: individuals aged 18 and above with at least 3 years of proven professional experience in a domain related with the target qualification of the RCA process.

- ✓ The SRCA is closely linked with QNQP, through the mandatory use of the qualifications standards registered in the [National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications](#) (CNQP).
- ✓ RCA processes are conducted only by RCA Centres, which must be accredited by the regulatory body of vocational education and training. Such centres can be established TVET institutions, public and private enterprises and institutions. Accreditation is valid for a maximum of 5 years, and can be renewed upon request and verification of all accreditation requisites.
- ✓ Quality assurance of evaluation and validation of candidates' skills and competences, as defined in the RCA Regulation.
- ✓ Phases of RCA: evaluation, validation, and certification of acquired skills and competences.
- ✓ The certificates obtained via RCA are identical to those obtained as outcome of formal training.
- ✓ Candidates can obtain a full or a partial qualification (module), according to the results of the RCA.

The [Order approving the SRCA Regulation](#) was published in the Bulletin of the Republic Nº 243 on 16/12/2021. The Regulation establishes the norms and procedures for implementation of SRCA, the process of authorization and accreditation RCA Centres, registration and selection of candidates, the principles and procedures of evaluation, verification, validation, and certification of acquired competences. Validation is the quality control of the evaluation process and is performed by a jury, which verifies and confirms the certification proposal and concludes the process. Candidates can be certified for a full qualification or units thereof. Certificates are issued by the institution responsible for the supervision of the sector of vocational education and training.

Operationalisation of the SRCA has started in 2021, with training and certification of SRCA professionals, and further accreditation of RCA Centres in which these professionals operate. RCA pilot implementation started with up to 45 candidates to a qualification in one of the three occupations: electrician, plumber or welder.

Outputs of the first pilot RCA project in Mozambique:

- Elaboration of RCA standards in five qualifications
- Training of RCA professionals: 14 RCA trained trainers (8 were certified),
- Accreditation of 4 RCA Centres
- Implementation of RCA processes: 44 candidates to a qualification in one of the three occupations: electrician, plumber or welder. A group of 25 candidates were certified: 11 in plumbing, 7 in oxyacetylene welding, 7 in electricity.

Lessons learned from this phase will inform the next steps towards improvement and mainstreaming of the SRCA.



## Seychelles



Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) in 2017 adopted a revised '[National Policy of RPL](#)', and '[National Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL](#)'. The RPL Policy (2017) builds on the Manual and Policy Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (2009) which consisted of policy and procedural documents on the conceptualization, development and implementation processes of RPL.

The new National Policy (2017) further clarifies RPL as a concept and enables implementation processes. The RPL Guidelines document is to be read in conjunction with the Policy document, to be used as a reference for all organisations and persons involved in the development of RPL models, implementation and assessment practices, and learner support processes. The Guidelines document is of importance to RPL practitioners, as well as for providers and learners, to enable understanding of the value of RPL in terms of qualifications, its possibility of increasing access, and the benefits of recognising all types of learning as suggested in the Seychelles National Qualifications Framework Regulations.

### Objectives

The objectives of RPL national policy for the further development and implementation of RPL are to ensure the following:

- A** Facilitation of access to further study and lifelong learning opportunities, transfer and award of credits leading to certification of qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), in essence, promoting equity of access and fair chances to all learners;
- B** Provision for further development, implementation and mainstreaming of RPL, including its resourcing, effective delivery and quality assurance;
- C** Development of a shared understanding that RPL is real in the Seychelles; it is already happening and can be used as needed to deal with human resource needs and scarce skills;
- D** Provision of a credible way of validating and certifying knowledge, skills and competencies;
- E** Provision of a basis for the SQA national RPL guidelines document to be developed;
- F** Creation of an enabling mechanism for potential candidates who may be lifelong learners, or potential job seekers to obtain qualifications and/or have their knowledge, skills and competencies validated as part of a qualification;
- G** Recognition of the roles and functions of the SQA, government departments, employers, professional bodies, public and private providers, and RPL practitioners in the provision of RPL across the education and training system.

### Benefits

RPL has the potential to improve employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion and self-esteem. The key drivers of and benefits for RPL are:

- A** Recognizing and validating prior learning, experience, knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in work or life experiences, previous non-formal training and workshop environments;
- B** Granting formal credit for learning regardless of where the learning was achieved;
- C** Allowing individuals who have gained significant experience in a particular field to be given the opportunity to become formally qualified;
- D** Encouraging lifelong learning in order to create a competent and adaptable workforce that can meet the challenges of a fast changing labour market and address skills shortages and gaps;
- E** Fostering employability and thus increasingly decent jobs;
- F** Improving efficiency and flexibility in education systems by allowing alternative learning pathways – workplace, non-formal, and informal learning – and fast-tracking the acquisition of qualifications;
- G** Establishing clear and credible quality assurance guidelines and mechanisms within education and training providers, overseen by the SQA;
- H** Ensuring that resources to implement RPL are sufficient and sustainable;
- I** Addressing barriers to RPL implementation, whether these be relational (between institutions and institutions and workplaces), resource-driven or legislative;
- J** Recognising that different kinds of RPL processes, different purposes for RPL and different RPL assessment models exist.

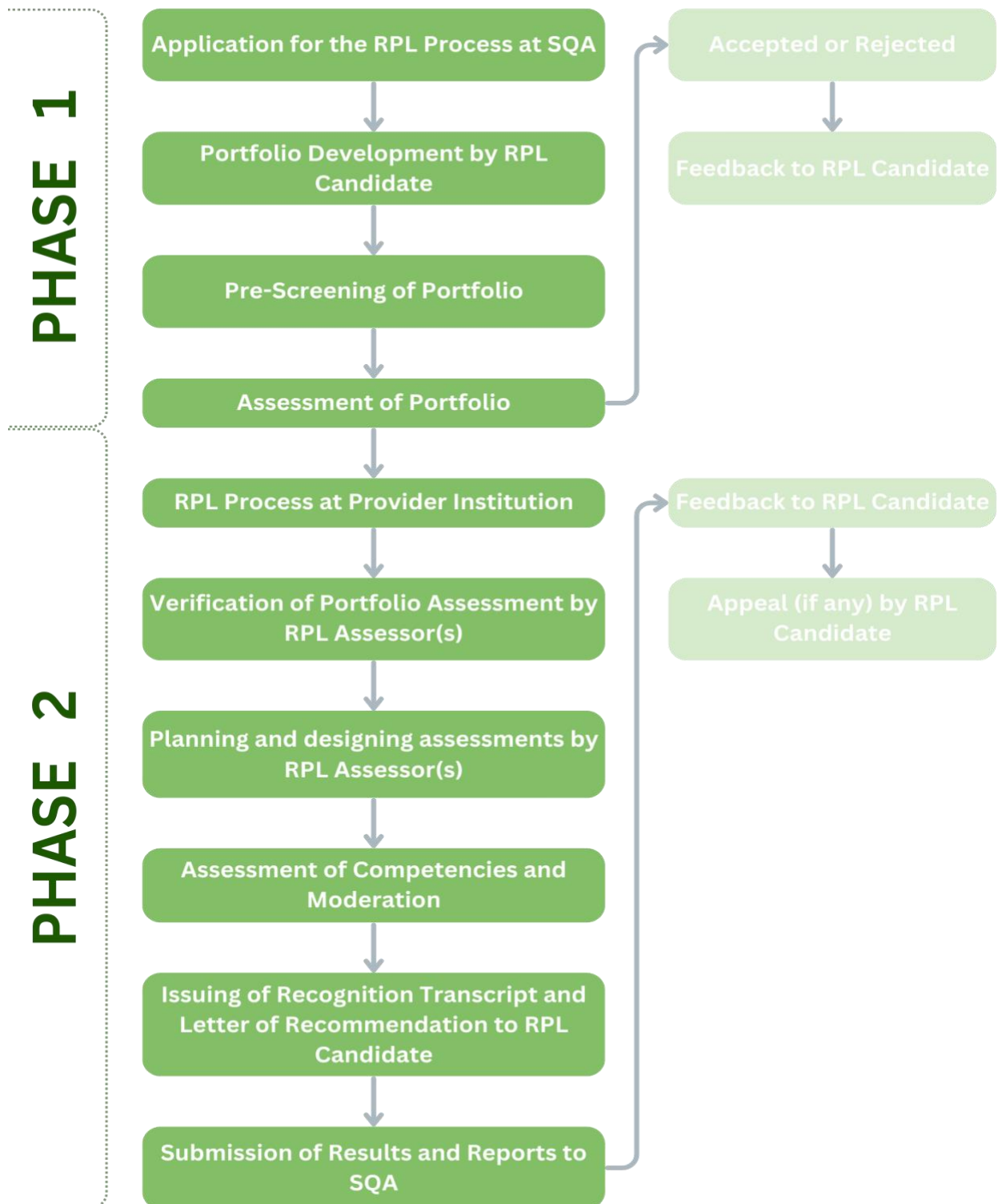
RPL serves a number of purposes, namely for:

- A** personal development by gaining credits towards a qualification;
- B** progression into a learning programme;
- C** seeking acceptance into higher studies;
- D** promotion and salary enhancement;
- E** changing a career path;
- F** meeting requirements of present employment;
- G** meeting regulatory requirements of some sectors in terms of employing qualified persons.

National co-ordination of RPL implementation in the Seychelles is situated at the SQA.

The SQA coordinates the implementation if the RPL counts for more than 25% of the competences of a qualification. For RPL of less than 25% of a qualification the SQA quality-assures the process implemented by the provider.

Table 11: RPL process in Seychelles



Source: National Guidelines for the Implementation of RPL, Seychelles (2017: 30)

## South Africa



Since its inception, South Africa's NQF has made provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL. The National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning was [amended](#) in March 2019.

- NQF Act 67 of 2008 (Also SAQA Act 58 of 1995)
- DHET's (2016) RPL Coordination Policy
- [SAQA National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL \(amended in March 2019\)](#); (Also 2002, 2013, 2016)
- Quality Councils' policies for RPL in NQF Sub-Frameworks
- RPL as a flexible learning pathway (FLP) tool

Two primary forms of RPL are distinguished, one to provide alternative access routes into learning programmes professional designations, employment and career progression and the other to provide for the awarding of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF. The [Ministerial RPL Coordination Policy](#) provides for the coordination and funding of RPL and elaborates and holds SAQA and the quality councils accountable to perform their roles in relation to RPL as stated in the NQF Act.

Since 2014, when the submission of the data became mandatory, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has made systematic efforts to make NQF stakeholders aware of this aspect and to enable the RPL data loads into the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD). While it is known that there have been many more successful RPL cases than those recorded, the amount of RPL being submitted is increasing over time. At the time of writing, the number of learners who had achieved one or more part-qualifications via RPL was 87 915, with the records of achievements of part-qualifications via RPL numbering 610 956. RPL in South Africa is undertaken and awarded in a holistic way, which includes the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed, and requires the involvement of the full range of NQF stakeholders.

South Africa's priorities for the future regarding RPL encompass a range of aspects and issues, in particular:

- ✓ Mapping/ developing articulation pathways for more sectors
- ✓ Taking good practices to scale
- ✓ Enhancing communication and information-sharing
- ✓ Ring-fencing funding for RPL/ FLPs
- ✓ Expanding TVET, CET and NQF Level 5 qualifications (UPSET)
- ✓ Closing data gaps
- ✓ Enhancing:

- articulation through curricula
- flexibility of administration systems
- student support in FLPs
- flexible modes of delivery
- sharing good practices

**Table 11: Overview of national RPL initiatives in different sectors**

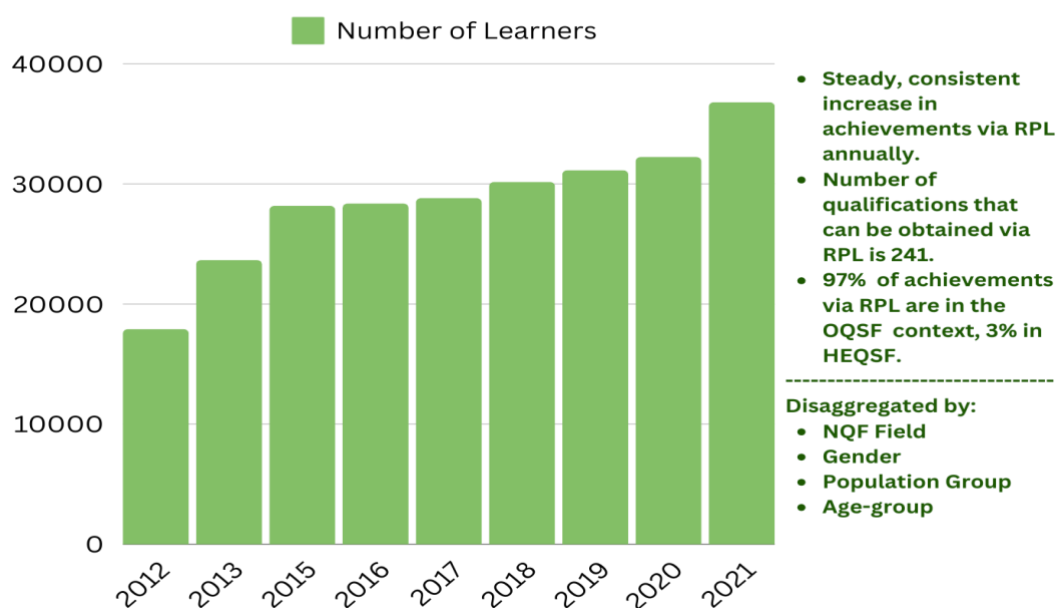
Agricultural sector	Food and Beverage (FoodBev) sector
Artisan RPL (APRL)	Marine Industry Association SA (MIASA)
Banking sector	National Artisan Moderating Body (NAMB)
Correctional Services	Rand Water
Democratic Nursing Association of SA (DENOSA)	Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC)
Department of Defence (DoD)	South African Police Service (SAPS)
Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA)	South African Sports Coaching Association (SASCA/SASCOC)
Department of Social Development (DSD)	State Information Technology Agency (SITA)
Department of Transport (DoT)	Work-at-Height sector (IWH)
Education and Labour Relations Council (ELRC)	Worker Education (Workers' College)

E-TV

Source: [SAQA's presentation at ACQF Peer Learning Webinar](#), 24/03/2022.

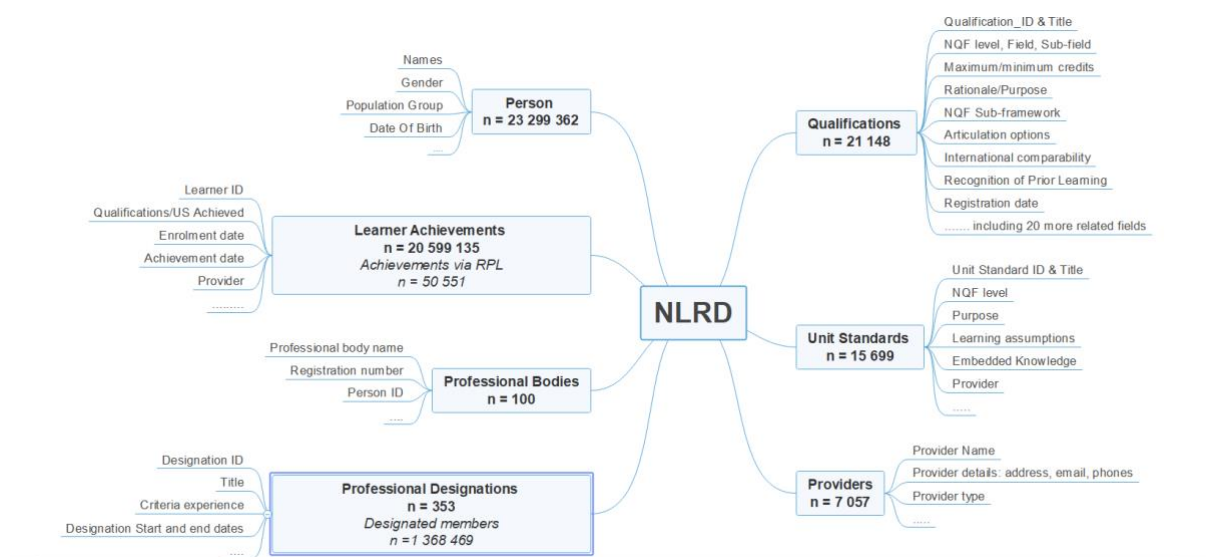
**Figure 1: Data on RPL in South Africa – RPL achievements**

## Achievements via RPL



Source: [SAQA's presentation at ACQF Peer Learning Webinar](#), 24/03/2022.

Figure 2: Data on RPL in South Africa – RPL achievements in the context of National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD). Data as of 01/05/2024.



Source: SAQA. E-mail. 01/05/2024

The number of achievements via RPL was 50,551, out of a total of 20,599,135 recorded in the NLRD.

The [Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development study of RPL](#), involving over 20 countries, positioned South Africa in a cluster of only 5 countries at ‘Stage 5 of 7’, which signified a country with ‘islands of good RPL practices’. More information: [ACQF Mapping – country report South Africa](#) (2020).

## Zambia



The establishment of Zambia Qualifications Authority is underpinned by the [The Zambia Qualifications Authority Act No. 13 of 2011](#).

According to the ZAQA Act, the objectives of ZAQA include: create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements; facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths. In respect to RPL, ZAQA

- develops and implements policy and criteria, in consultation with relevant awarding and quality assurance bodies, for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer in order to achieve the objectives of the Zambia Qualifications Framework.
- recognises and validate competences for purposes of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems;
- recognises and validates competences for purposes of certification obtained outside the country.

ZAQA published in 2016 the '[Policy and Criteria for Recognition of Prior Learning in Zambia](#)', which sets out the policy and criteria for recognizing prior learning under the Zambia Qualifications Framework. Principles and Procedures for the recognition of prior learning are described and intended for use by appropriate Authorities and the general public as defined under the ZAQA Act. This document shall be read in conjunction with the Zambia Qualifications Framework Level Descriptors.

The aim for recognising prior learning in Zambia is to allow learners who have not been able to attend formal education but have managed to gain significant experience in a particular field to be given an opportunity to earn a qualification or to upgrade an existing qualification, which can be at any level of education and training. This policy recognises equivalences rather than a precise match between experience and academic learning. Assessment of learning from experience, consideration of relevant competences and equivalences contained in the qualification requires a set of agreed criteria, policies and procedures which this document specifies.

RPL practices of all awarding and quality assurance bodies should be guided by the following:

- policies and procedures should be explicit and fair; and applied consistently;
- policies and procedures adopted should help an institution to demonstrate that it properly exercises its responsibility for the standards of all awards granted in its name;
- information available to learners and staff should be clear, explicit and accessible;
- roles and responsibilities of learners should be clearly defined;
- learners wishing to access recognition of prior learning should be competent to undertake their responsibilities;
- appropriate support should be offered to learners;
- policies and procedures should be monitored and reviewed regularly.

The 12 Guiding Principles of RPL are distributed in five main clusters (headings):

- Policies and procedures
- Information
- Roles and responsibilities
- Support
- Monitoring and review

## Zimbabwe



Since 1984 Zimbabwe's Manpower Planning and Development (MPD) Act, amended in July 2021, has given provision for the achievement of qualifications and part-qualifications through RPL. The 2018 National Qualifications Framework facilitated the inclusion of RPL competency standard certifications to be formally recognised alongside TVET, General Education and Higher Education qualifications. The ZNQF was further backed by a legislation framework through amendment of the MPD Act of 1984 amended in July 2021.

Zimbabwe through the Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO) has set "The process of systematically and clinically measuring skills, through the practical performance of tasks and written expression of technical knowledge, using established competency

standard skills proficiencies for the level of the test as given in the **Statutory Instruments of the respective Industries and Trades**".

**What are the requirements?**

- ✓ Application for RPL
  - **Preparation and Pre-Selection screening**
- ✓ Submission of documentary evidence of relevant work experience in the trade; or
- ✓ documentary evidence of apprenticeship; or
- ✓ In the case of Institutional candidates, documentary evidence of training in all cases two certified photographs (17x25)mm;
- ✓ if trained abroad, official translation of evidence of training and / or industrial experience in foreign countries;
- ✓ in the case of re-testing a completed re-test application form together with a certified Photocopy of the previous statement of results or certificate;
- ✓ a certified photocopy of the National Identity Document;
- ✓ a certified photocopy of the long Birth Certificate;
- ✓ Allocation of Mentor/ Human Skills Planning Officer to Prepare the candidate;

**Who is eligible for a Trade Test/ RPL?**

A candidate is allowed to sit for a trade test in a particular class in his/her trade if:

- He/she has the following verifiable period of practical experience in the trade:
  - 2 years qualifies for Class 4
  - 3 years qualifies for Class 3
  - 4 years qualifies for Class 2
  - 5 years or more Class 1

However, a candidate who has the requisite experience for a higher-class level has an option of choosing a lower-class level. A candidate who opts to undertake a test at a lower-class level like any other candidate who registers for a particular class level, can only progress to the next higher-class level on successful completion of that class level; or

- He/she has undergone apprenticeship training; or
- He/she has undergone a formal training in his/her trade for the relevant class.

**The Minimum Formal Training Periods are as follows:**

Industry	CLASS 4	CLASS 3	CLASS 2	CLASS 1
<b>Hairdressing and Hotel &amp; Catering</b>	N/A	1 year	2 years	3 years
<b>Automotive, Mechanical, Construction, Electrical, Printing</b>	1 years	2 years	3 years	4 years

- Zimbabwe has designated 25 new industry trades in 2024 in line with emerging technologies affecting ICT, Agricultural Engineering, Mining Engineering, Renewable Energy and Health Sciences this is informed by labour market information indicators from employers. These are outside the traditional fields cited in the figure above.



### **Components of the trade test/RPL**

- ✓ Candidates are tested in both theory and practical assessments against industry set competency standards. The theoretical part, as determined by the relevant trade, is tested in written form for classes one to four and orally up to class three for those candidates deemed illiterate.
- ✓ The nature and duration of both the written and the practical trade test is determined by the Higher Education Examinations Council National Trade Testing Committees.

### **RPL Management and supervision**

- ✓ The Trade Testing Officer at the Regional Office is responsible for the preparation of RPL facilities and consumables for both theory and practical trade test assessments;
- ✓ A practical test is conducted in a real-life production type of industrial environment or as good a re-creation of it as to pass for one;
- ✓ The Trade Testing Panel ensures that the candidates complete their trade test tasks without any technical assistance from any source;
- ✓ The candidate is deemed to have passed the trade test assessment if he/she has satisfied the panel in all the practical test tasks with a minimum of 60% in all tasks.
- ✓ Practical Trade Test Assessments may last for a period ranging from a few hours to four days depending on the nature of the trade and class.
- ✓ Three officials conduct the RPL exercise; a Trade Testing Officer, who presides over the practical test assessment and two experienced Journeymen Class One independent examiners from industry.

### **RPL Certification**

The statement of results is issued by the Industrial Training and Trade Testing Regional Office whereas a Skilled Worker Certificate bearing name, class trade photograph, signature, Skilled Worker Registration Number, Serial Number of the Certificate is issued to successful candidates centrally by the Higher Education Examinations Council. This is all done in compliance with HEXCO RPL Rules and Regulations.

### **RPL Funding**

RPL is funded by a 1% training levy collected through the Zimbabwe Manpower Development Fund (ZIMDEF) as agreed with industry back in 1992.

The same ZIMDEF Training Levy funds TVET curriculum development, assessments and even stipends for TVET learners (direct entries or apprentices) on attachment plus company rebates for participating in TVET RPL activities.

### **RPL Quality Assurance**

RPL in Zimbabwe is offered through 16 line Ministries that host Mandate related TVET Institutions (for example Ministry of Mines and Mineral Development has Zimbabwe School of Mines; Ministry of Energy has Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority Training Centre and Ministry of Agriculture has eight

Agricultural Colleges ) but all these have their RPL centrally accredited and assessed by the Higher education Examinations Council in line with the ZNQF of 2018 and the National TVET Policy of 2023. Before employment both local and foreign private and public industry confirm the accreditation status of the TVET RPL qualifications and their placement on the Zimbabwe National Qualification framework.

## 6. Conclusions

This Handbook for RPL Practitioners builds on international and African experiences, knowledge and practices. It combines a readable and pertinent conceptual and theoretical background, with practical guidance on processes, steps, and technical components of RPL implementation. Moreover, the Handbook gathered seven concrete examples of RPL in African countries, which are useful for any institution and country on the continent interested in benchmarking and developing the national RPL framework.

It provides a robust framework for the effective implementation of RPL within the context of lifelong learning. It underscores the critical role that RPL plays in also validating and recognising the learning outcomes acquired outside traditional educational contexts. By doing so, RPL promotes inclusivity, equity, and social justice, ensuring that all forms of learning are valued and formally acknowledged.

Central to this Handbook is the concept of lifelong learning, which is vital in today's rapidly evolving world. The Handbook articulates the dual benefits of RPL: enhancing individual employability by formally recognising all learning outcomes, including non-formal and informal ones, and supporting continuous occupational and personal development. This dual approach not only benefits individuals by improving their life and career prospects but also contributes to the broader societal goal of creating a workforce with visible knowledge and skills.

The theoretical foundations of RPL, as detailed in here, are essential for understanding its application and implications. Theories such as constructivist learning, experiential learning, situated learning, adult learning (andragogy), and transformative learning provide solid underpinnings for RPL practices. These theories emphasise the importance of experiential and contextual learning, recognising that much valuable learning occurs outside formal educational environments. If these theoretical perspectives are integrated, RPL practitioners can develop more effective and responsive assessment strategies.

Quality assurance is highlighted as a pivotal component of the RPL process. The Handbook provides comprehensive guidelines on ensuring that RPL assessments are reliable, valid, authentic and equitable. Key aspects include standardised assessment criteria, rigorous training for assessors, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These measures are crucial for maintaining the credibility and integrity of the RPL system. They ensure that all stakeholders, including applicants, employers, educational institutions and practitioners themselves, have confidence in the RPL process and its outcomes.

The practical guidelines offered for RPL practitioners cover the entire spectrum of the RPL process, from initial information and guidance to final assessment and qualification. This Handbook stresses the importance of providing clear, accessible information to potential applicants, ensuring that they understand the RPL process and its benefits. It outlines the steps for administrative registration, application screening, and eligibility verification, emphasising the need for a systematic and transparent approach.

Preparation for the final assessment is a critical phase, requiring careful planning and alignment with assessment criteria. The Handbook provides detailed strategies for developing and implementing fair and comprehensive assessments. It also emphasises the importance of providing constructive feedback to applicants, supporting their ongoing development and preparation for qualification. The

final assessment phase is crucial in determining whether applicants meet the required standards, and it must be conducted with the highest level of rigor and objectivity.

Certification (awarding of qualification), the culminating phase of the RPL process, formally recognises applicants' learning outcomes and achievements. This Handbook details the procedures for issuing qualifications, ensuring that they are accurate and reflective of the applicants' demonstrated abilities. It also discusses the importance of maintaining detailed records and providing follow-up support to certified individuals, guiding them towards further learning and career advancement opportunities.

In addition to these procedural guidelines, the Handbook includes examples of good practice and case studies that illustrate successful RPL implementation. These examples provide valuable insights and practical tips for practitioners, helping them to navigate challenges and optimise their RPL processes. The inclusion of a quality assurance checklist for pilot programmes further enhances this Handbook's utility, offering a practical tool for ensuring excellence in RPL initiatives.

In conclusion, this Handbook for RPL Practitioners serves as an indispensable resource for those involved in the RPL process. It equips practitioners with the theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to implement RPL effectively and ethically. Following the principles and guidelines outlined in this Handbook will help RPL practitioners making a significant impact on the lives of individuals, helping them to achieve formal recognition for their learning outcomes and enhancing their career prospects. Moreover, the Handbook contributes to the broader goals of educational and social reform, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society where all learning is valued and recognised.

## 7. References

- ACQF, 2021. Thematic Brief 1. Concepts and definitions. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-1-concepts-and-definitions>
- ACQF, 2022. Validation and Recognition of Learning, ACQF Guidelines 4. <https://acqf.africa/resources/policy-guidelines/acqf-guidelines/acqf-guideline-3-validation-of-learning/acqf-guideline-4-validation-and-recognition-of-learning-english/@@display-file/file/Guideline%204%20Validation%20and%20Recognition%20of%20Learning%20May2022%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf>
- ACQF, 2022. Validation and Recognition of Learning, ACQF Training Module 4. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/training-modules/training-modules-1-to-10-english/training-module-4-validation-and-recognition-of-learning/@@display-file/file/EN%20TM4%20Validation%20and%20Recognition%20of%20Learning%20WEB.pdf>
- ACQF, 2022. Peer Learning Webinar - RPL / VAE / RVCC (RCA) (Examples from Cameroon, France, Ghana). <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/webinars/14th-peer-learning-webinar>
- Becker, G. S. (1964). *Human capital: A theoretical and empirical analysis, with special reference to education*. University of Chicago Press. (Third version in 1993)
- Candy, P. C. (1991). *Self-direction for lifelong learning: A comprehensive guide to theory and practice*. Jossey-Bass.
- Castel-Branco E., 2022. Recognition of Prior Learning Gives us Wings, for Transition to Decent Work, Learning and Social Activity. Thematic brief 14. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-14-recognition-of-prior-learning-gives-us-wings-for-transitions-to-decent-work-learning-and-social-activity/@@display-file/file/Thematic%20Brief%2014%20RPL%20Wings%20for%20LLL%20Overview%20RPL%20policies%20and%20tools%20WEB.pdf>
- Cedefop NQF Online Tool. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/nqfs-online-tool>
- Cedefop RPL (Validation) Web-resources: <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/projects/validation-non-formal-and-informal-learning>
- Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>
- Council Recommendation of 22 May 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32017H0615%2801%29>
- Council Recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32018H1210(01))
- Cedefop. 2015. European Guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning, 2015. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3073>
- Cedefop, 2023. *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 124. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/3093>

European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning : final report*, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/55823>

Cedefop, 2023. European Guidelines for Validating Non-formal and Informal Learning. Third Edition [https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3093\\_en.pdf](https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3093_en.pdf)

Delors, J., & UNESCO. (1996). *Learning: The treasure within*. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century. UNESCO Publishing.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice interruptus: Critical reflections on the "post socialist" condition*. Routledge.

Jarvis, P. (2006). *Towards a comprehensive theory of human learning*. Routledge.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.

Knowles, M. S. (1973). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Gulf Publishing.

KNQA, 2024. Recognition of Prior Learning Policy Framework.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.

Lindeman, E. C. (1926). *The meaning of adult education*. New Republic, Inc.

Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S., & Baumgartner, L. M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3rd ed.). Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.

OECD. (1996). *Lifelong learning for all*. Meeting of the Education Committee at Ministerial Level, 16-17 January 1996. OECD Publishing.

Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. International Universities Press.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.

Tough, A. (1979). *The adult's learning projects: A fresh approach to theory and practice in adult learning*. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Yeaxlee, B. A. (1929). *Lifelong Education*. London: Cassell.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

### Sources from African countries

Decree-Law Nr 54/2014 of 22 September. Regulates the system of recognition, validation and certification of professional competences acquired and developed throughout life, namely in the context of work. At: <https://kiosk.incv.cv/1.1.56.1903/>

Decree-Law Nr 13/2018 of 7 December. Revises the Bases of the Education System. At: [https://minedu.gov.cv/media/orientacao/2020/10/06/Decreto-legislativo\\_n%C2%BA\\_13\\_2018\\_LBSE.pdf](https://minedu.gov.cv/media/orientacao/2020/10/06/Decreto-legislativo_n%C2%BA_13_2018_LBSE.pdf)

Decree-Law Nr 4/2018 of 10 January, Establishes the new legal regime of the SNQ. At: <https://kiosk.incv.cv/V/2018/1/10/1.1.4.2461/>

Decree-Law Nr 7/2018 of 7 February, Regulates the organisation and functioning of the UC-SNQ. At: <http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Regula-o-Funcionamento-UC-SNQ.pdf>

Joint Ordinance Nr 9/2020 of 17 February, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education, Establishes the structure and organisation of the CNQ. At: [http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo\\_20-02-2020\\_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf](http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo_20-02-2020_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf)

Joint Ordinance Nr 10/2020 of 17 February, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Education, Regulates the NQF. At: [http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo\\_20-02-2020\\_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf](http://iefp.cv/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/bo_20-02-2020_20-CNQ-e-QNQ.pdf)

UC-SNQ, SNQ, Procedures Guide – Methodology for Elaboration of Professional Qualifications. Unpublished.

UC-SNQ, Guide supporting the operationalisation of processes of professional RVCC, March 2016. At: <http://docplayer.com.br/65626641-Operacionalizacao-de-processos-de-rvcc-profissional.html>

UC-SNQ, Process of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Professional Competences, March 2013. At: <http://docplayer.com.br/49553365-Processo-de-reconhecimento-validacao-e-certificacao-de-competencias-profissionais.html>

Mauritius Qualifications Authority, Recognition of Prior Learning Guidelines. 2016. [https://mqa.govmu.org/mqa/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RPL-Guidelines\\_pdf-version.pdf](https://mqa.govmu.org/mqa/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/RPL-Guidelines_pdf-version.pdf)

Mozambique. ANEP. All RPL resources and texts: <http://www.anep.gov.mz/SRCA>

NQF Act 67 of 2008 (Also SAQA Act 58 of 1995)

DHET's (2016). RPL Coordination Policy (South Africa)

SADC Guidelines for RPL, 2017.

<https://www.saqa.org.za/docs/webcontent/2017/SADC%20RPL%20Guidelines.pdf>

Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA), 2017, National Policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). <http://www.sqa.sc/Resources/RPL/NationalPolicyRPL.pdf>

Seychelles Qualifications Authority (SQA) (2017), National Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). <http://www.sqa.sc/Resources/RPL/NationalGuidelinesRPL.pdf>

South African Qualifications Authority, [SAQA National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL \(amended in March 2019\)](#); (Also 2002, 2013, 2016)

Zambia. ZAQA. 2023. Recognition of Prior Learning Policy. Revised March 2'23 <https://www.zaqa.gov.zm/learners/#priorlearning>

## Annexes

### Glossary of Key Terms

Source: ACQF. 2021. Thematic Brief 1. Concepts and definitions. <https://acqf.africa/capacity-development-programme/thematic-briefs/acqf-thematic-brief-1-concepts-and-definitions>

#### Accreditation

Is formal recognition of an entity as having met set standards to perform assessment and certification of occupational competences.

#### Assessment

The process of determining if a candidate possesses the required competencies of an occupational qualification as stated in the occupational standards leading to certification.

#### Assessment Centre

an establishment accredited for purposes of conducting assessment on certain specific competencies or qualifications.

#### Assessor

An RPL professional accredited to conduct RPL assessment.

#### Certificate

An official document, issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following a standard assessment procedure.

#### Competence

Competence means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

#### Credential

Formal certification issued for successful achievement of a defined set of outcomes – for example, successful completion of a course in recognition of having achieved particular awareness, knowledge, skills or attitude competences; successful completion of an apprenticeship or traineeship.

#### Credit

‘Credit’ means confirmation that a part of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of learning outcomes has been assessed and validated by a competent authority, according to an agreed standard; credit is awarded by competent authorities when the individual has achieved the defined learning outcomes, evidenced by appropriate assessments and can be expressed in a quantitative value (e.g. credits or credit points) demonstrating the estimated workload an individual typically needs for achieving related learning outcomes.

‘Credit transfer’ means the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit in one context to have it valued and recognised in another context.

#### Employability

The degree of adaptability an individual demonstrates in finding and keeping a job, and updating occupational skills; relates to portable competences and qualifications that enhance an individual's capacity to make use of the education and training opportunities available in order to secure and retain decent work.



## **Evaluation**

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed policy, plan or programme, including its design, implementation and results. It aims to assess the relevance and fulfilment of objectives and strategies with the intention of informing decision-making. 'Formative' evaluation relates to ongoing activities and helps guide implementation. 'Summative' evaluation assesses the results of a particular initiative, after completion.

## **Formal education and training**

Education or training provided in educational institutions, such as schools, universities, colleges, or off-the-job in a workplace, usually involving direction from a teacher or instructor.

## **Formative assessment**

A range of formal, non-formal and informal ongoing assessment procedures used to focus teaching and learning activities to improve student attainment, or which are required for the purpose of a year mark.

## **Guidance and counselling**

A range of activities designed to help individuals make educational, vocational or personal decisions and carry them out before and after they enter the labour market.

## **Informal learning**

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organised or structured (in terms of objectives, time or learning support). Informal learning in most cases is unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

## **Knowledge**

Knowledge is central to any discussion of learning and may be understood as the way in which individuals and societies apply meaning to experience. It can therefore be seen broadly as the information, understanding, skills, values and attitudes acquired through learning. As such, knowledge is linked inextricably to the cultural, social, environmental and institutional contexts in which it is created and reproduced.

## **Learning outcomes**

Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.

## **Micro-credential**

A micro-credential is a proof the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards.

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring is the continuous and systematic collection of data on specific indicators in order to provide the main actors of an ongoing development intervention with indications as to the extent of progress and the achievement of objectives (in relation to allocated resources).

## **Non-formal learning**

Planned learning activities, not explicitly designated as learning, towards the achievement of a qualification or part qualification; often associated with learning that results in improved workplace practice.

### **Portfolio**

means a guided collection of objects, pictures, videos, written testimonials and any other as per the assessment guide, attained over a period and duly prepared by an RPL candidate as evidence in support of his or her application for RPL assessment or issuance of a partial or full qualification.

### **Practitioner**

Means individual accredited by relevant authorities to carry out RPL assessment process.

### **Prior learning**

The knowledge, know-how and/or competences acquired through previously unrecognised training or experience.

### **Qualification**

Means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.

### **Qualifications framework**

'A policy and instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims at integrating and coordinating national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society.

### **Qualifications system**

This includes all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, QA processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent. One feature of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.

### **Recognition**

'Formal recognition of learning outcomes' means the process of granting official status by a competent authority to acquired learning outcomes for purposes of further studies or employment, through (i) the award of qualifications (certificates, diploma or titles); (ii) the validation of non-formal and informal learning; (iii) the grant of equivalence, credit or waivers.

### **Recognition of prior learning**

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process through which formal, non-formal and informal learning is measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts and certified against the requirements for credit, access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system or workplace. (Source: National Policy for the Implementation of RPL: par 30).

The aim is to make it possible to obtain formal recognition for knowledge gained throughout life, such as in workplaces and own reading or experiences. The RPL process also entails providing support to an applicant to ensure that knowledge is discovered and displayed in terms of a relevant qualification registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

### **Skills**

A bundle of knowledge, attributes and capacities that can be learnt and that enable individuals to successfully and consistently perform an activity or task and can be built upon and extended through learning.

### **Validation of learning outcomes**

Confirmation by a competent body that learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and/or competences) acquired by an individual in a formal, non-formal or informal setting have been assessed against pre-defined criteria and are compliant with the requirements of a validation standard. Validation typically leads to certification.

### **Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes**

‘Validation of non-formal and informal learning’ means the process of confirmation by a competent authority that an individual has acquired learning outcomes acquired in non- formal and informal learning settings measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases: identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual, documentation to make visible the individual’s experiences, a formal assessment of those experiences and certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification.