



**ACQF-II project**



African Continental  
Qualifications Framework

**Eswatini**

**Recognition of Prior Learning**

**RPL Policy Document**

**Version 2.1 for EQA (13/04/2024)**

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>ACQF</b>	African Continental Qualifications Framework
<b>AU</b>	African Union
<b>CAT</b>	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
<b>DIVT</b>	Directorate of Industrial and Vocational Training
<b>EQA</b>	Eswatini Qualifications Authority
<b>ESHEC</b>	Eswatini Higher Education Council
<b>ESQF</b>	Eswatini Qualifications Framework
<b>ESSP</b>	Education Sector Strategic Plan
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>GoE</b>	Government of the Kingdom of Eswatini
<b>HE</b>	Higher education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MoET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>RPL</b>	Recognition of Prior Learning
<b>SADC</b>	Southern African Development Community
<b>SADCQF</b>	SADC Qualifications Framework
<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

## 1. Preamble

The Eswatini Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy builds on the Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF) the capacity to genuinely support all learners able to demonstrate learning outcomes, however and wherever acquired, in their achieving of a qualification. It is Eswatini national policy on RPL.

### 1.1. General Aim of this Policy Document

This Policy document defines the scope, objectives, principles, main phases, and key technical orientations for the harmonised RPL system in Eswatini, coherent with the ESQF and responsive to other related national policies. RPL concerns the identification, documentation, assessment and certification of peoples' acquired skills and competences, independently of the context of learning (formal, non-formal, informal).

Lifelong learning, and the parity of esteem of all forms of learning is fundamental in a time of great transformations of work and technologies, requiring agile and new forms of reskilling and upskilling, learning by experience, and access to all types of recognition of learning outcomes.

RPL is not new in Eswatini, but there is no common nationally harmonised RPL policy. Diverse practices and approaches have been in application in different parts of the education and training system, with mixed results especially in respect to credibility across sectors and institutions.

This common national RPL Policy will fill this gap and enable a deeper and wider roll out of the potentialities of the ESQF for the people, policy makers, socio-economic partners and the government as a whole.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of the policy is to provide opportunities for a second chance for achieving a qualification to all learners in Eswatini that are able to prove their learning outcomes, and/or competences achieved from learning already undertaken. It aims to:

- Enhance learner's progression into and among ESQF qualifications even those without a qualification achieved in the initial education and training system.
- Recognise that all learning has value and that the corresponding learning outcomes should be given currency in relation to qualification standards (or adapted occupational standards), and that learning can be formal, non-formal and/or informal.
- Stipulate broad guidelines regarding RPL implementation in Eswatini, for effective policy implementation.
- Provide a solid basis to pave the way for future improvements of the RPL system in Eswatini in the context of the ESQF and ACQF.

### 1.3. Scope of the Policy

This policy covers all education and training sectors that issue ESQF qualifications, and labour market occupations that use these qualifications, for recruitment, promotion in employment, and/or occupational mobility. This include self-employment, as a qualification is evidence for the skills and competences possessed by self-employed workers looking for customers.

The terminology used in the RPL policy is meant to be broad and applicable to both the world of education and the world of work. There is a vision that the different stakeholders in Eswatini should agree on the concepts rather than on the terms. To that extent, the RPL policy benefits from the common language that has been introduced in the context of the work on the ESQF by the Eswatini Qualification Authority (EQA). A glossary consistent with the choices made in the context of the ESQF and the ACQF is appended to this policy document.

### 1.4. Users of the Policy

The main users of this policy are the organisations registered for awarding qualifications – typically education and training providers –, learners and public bodies interested in qualifications – e.g., sectoral ministries –, employers, industry sectors stakeholders, quality assurance authorities and other regulatory

bodies who may use this policy as a guide to the best way to mobilise RPL for helping individuals accessing the formal education and training system, resuming studies and/or (re)entering the labour market.

All individual and bodies interested in giving value and currency to all learning outcomes, however and wherever acquired.

### **1.5. Monitoring of the Implementation of the Policy**

The Eswatini Qualification Authority (EQA), with the assistance of the accrediting authorities in each education and training sector are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the use of this policy.

## **2. Context and Recent Reforms in the Qualifications Domain in Eswatini**

This chapter presents the context for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to be situated in the context of the work on the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) and of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework (ESQF).

### **2.1. General Context**

RPL is at the top of the policy and research agendas in many African countries, and beyond. The foundational elements related to RPL have already been presented in the ACQF context (AU, 2022; ACQF, 2022). They all put forward the consistency that exists between RPL and National Qualifications Frameworks, and with key policy dimensions such as labour market needs, lifelong learning, equity and social inclusion.

This policy document uses these foundational ACQF documents to provide a contextualised policy document for the purpose of envisioning the forthcoming RPL system in Eswatini. It provides rules, guidelines, principles, and procedures adapted to the context of Eswatini for setting in motion a sustainable, efficient, and effective RPL system.

It aims at establishing a framework for decision-making and actions within the Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) and in Eswatini and general.

### **2.2. Recent reforms in the qualifications domain in Eswatini**

The recent reforms in Eswatini in relation to the education and training system aim at increasing equitable access to quality and relevant lifelong learning opportunities.

#### **Focus on Eswatini Qualifications Framework**

*“Increased scope for RPL”* is one of the key objectives of the Eswatini Qualifications Framework ([ESQF](#)), demonstrating the priority given by the decision makers to develop and implement this fundamental pillar of the nation’s lifelong learning system.

The [Eswatini Qualifications Framework \(ESQF\)](#) was approved in August 2020 (Cabinet Paper Number- CPN/MOET/116/2020) and published by the [Eswatini Higher Education Council \(ESHEC\)](#). While the essential legal basis of the Eswatini QF with its core elements is in place, actual implementation has seen a new impetus in 2023 with the start of EQA’s operations.

The [purpose of the ESQF](#) is twofold:

#### **1. Promoting Lifelong Learning**

- Improving understanding of learning and qualifications, and how they relate to each other.
- Improving access to education and training.
- Making progression routes easier and clearer thus improving learner and career mobility.
- Increasing scope for recognition of prior learning.

## 2. Quality Assurance and Recognition

- Ensuring that qualifications are relevant to perceived industry and socio-economic needs.
- Ensuring compatibility of the same qualification offered by different institutions.
- Ensuring that education and training standards are defined by agreed learning outcomes and applied consistently.
- Maintaining international comparability of standards, especially in the Southern African context, to ensure international competitiveness, and to facilitate student and graduate mobility.

The recently established [Eswatini Qualifications Authority](#) (EQA) has a pivotal role in coordinating and implementing the ESQF and the related policies and tools, notably RPL, Credit Accumulation and Transfer System, and a future digital qualifications management system.

### 2.3. Learning outcomes based ESQF

The ESQF defines:

- a “qualification” as the formal recognition of the achievement of the required number and range of credits and such other requirements at specific levels of the ESQF as determined by the relevant bodies registered for such purpose by the EQA
- “Registration” as an action or process of registering or of being registered in terms of the EQA Act.

The ESQF level descriptors have three domains: Knowledge, Skills and Personal Attributes. Level descriptors are broad, generic, qualitative statements:

- of learning outcomes that will be achieved at a specific level of the qualifications framework
- that describe the characteristics of the generic outcomes of each of the ten levels in the ESQF. These characteristics consist of the knowledge, skills, competences and attributes that individuals at a given level should possess or be able to demonstrate on achieving the qualification.

The level descriptors:

- may be used to aid the assessment of claims for recognition of prior learning (RPL)
- are designed to act as a guide to locate a qualification (and its associated learning programmes) at the appropriate level on the ESQF
- are formulated to help in making comparisons between qualifications in a variety of fields and disciplines that are located at the same level of the ESQF

The ESQF is based on learning outcomes, a concept defined in terms of what a learner is expected to know, understand and can do at the end of a learning sequence. The ESQF provides the basis for the development of courses and study programmes based on learning outcomes and credits.

Three broad types of qualifications can be placed on the ESQF:

- Degrees
- Diplomas
- Certificates

The qualification types are used to encourage flexibility and the accurate assignment to a level. Each qualification on the ESQF describes what a learner needs to know or what they must be able to do. The qualification titles will allow for the comparability and easy understanding of qualifications, as well as the improved international recognition of qualifications.

Each qualification on the ESQF will have a statement of learning outcomes, including:

- What the qualification represents in terms of the application of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes
- The components of the qualification which, in their combination, make up the complete qualification.

## 2.4. ESQF implementation tools

The ESQF implementation tools include:

- Policy and guidelines on CAT (2021). The design of new programmes aligns with the CAT policy
- Guidelines, on the registration of qualifications on the ESQF and related tools, have been developed and the registration of qualifications started for TVET qualifications
- Classification of study Fields and sub fields have been established based on the 2013 UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) Statistics
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is at the initial reflection stage, and EQA plans development of RPL Policy and Guidelines (in cooperation with ACQF-II). This will include capacity development activities and comparison with other relevant RPL systems and practices.

The ESQF has a [Policy and Guidelines on Credit Accumulation and Transfer \(CAT\)](#) that was approved in 2021. According to the Eswatini CATS: 1 credit = 10 notional hours. The CAT Policy implies that an academic year with full-time study equates to a minimum of 120 credits or 1200 notional hours. This is in line with CAT policies of other SADC countries.

The guidelines are intended for:

- use during the design and development of learning outcomes/ materials, teaching and learning
- programme evaluation and review.

The objectives of the CAT policy are to:

- Serve as a blueprint for the development and review of programmes using learning outcomes and credits
- Act as a reference tool for allocating credits and supporting student's mobility within and across institutions, programmes, sub-frameworks of the ESQF as well as guide in the evaluation and transfer of learners from other countries
- Create harmony and transparency in credit weighting, accumulation and transfer.

The CAT policy guidelines apply to: Programmes accredited by ESHEC; all Higher Education and, TVET qualifications on the ESQF; individuals who may want to transfer their credits to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Eswatini; curriculum design; and stakeholders who support higher and TVET education in the Kingdom of Eswatini.

## 2.5. Governance of the ESQF

From 2016 to 2022, development and implementation of the ESQF was under the ESHEC, established under the Higher Education Act of 2013 (Kingdom of Eswatini, 2013). However, the mandate of ESHEC covers only higher education in Eswatini.

The Eswatini Qualifications Authority (EQA) was established in 2022 to ensure the generation of credible qualifications across Eswatini's entire education and skills development system (not only higher education) and to streamline ESQF responsibilities.

## 2.6. The Link between NQF and RPL

The consultation process for the elaboration of the ESQF and related policies has involved stakeholders of all origins, including employers, industry practitioners, professional organisations, educators, and graduates.

As such, the approach followed by the EQA is friendly to the establishment of a recognition of prior learning system as it identifies what the learner is expected to know and do by the end of the learning experience, and not only a long [formal] programme.

In a nutshell, all the recent orientations taken by EQA seem very conducive to improving access and equitable access, for example fighting the former operating mode that meant that the education's sectors operated in silos, resulting in challenges when learners required to articulate either vertically or



horizontally. One of the major breakthroughs will therefore be the introduction of policy and approach to recognition of prior learning (RPL) coherent and consistent across all sub-sectors of education and training, and applied in harmonised manner for the identification, documentation, certification and

There is a high degree of awareness in Eswatini that:

- A national qualifications framework has a crucial role to structure the education and training system.
- The value of qualifications is high, and a qualification oftentimes corresponds to a right to practice a trade.

The value of RPL is well understood since it will give currency to existing individuals' skills and competences that are not substantiated in a qualification / credential yet.

The Learning outcomes principle underpinning the ESQF, and its qualifications is an indispensable pillar for the conceptualisation and application of RPL.

The link between the national qualifications framework (ESQF) and the recognition of prior learning system will be developed along the following lines:

- Readability of the National Qualifications System
- Transparency of the education and training system
- Easiness of choices for RPL applicants

### **2.7. The link between RPL and Micro-credentials**

The link between the concept of micro-credential and the recognition of prior learning system will be developed along the following lines:

- Access to qualifications organised over time, progressively, throughout life, for RPL applicants to make well informed choices.
- Promotion of lifelong learning.
- Help develop the rationality of RPL applicants.

### **2.8. Paradigm**

The paradigm for developing RPL is built along those lines:

- Search for consistency between skills and competences actually owned by individuals and skills and competences that are visible.
- Decent work, decent wage.
- Opportunities for occupational and social promotion.
- New labour market trends (innovation, autonomy).
- Globalisation (Eswatini in SADC, in AU).

## **3. Benefits of RPL for Individuals, Employers and for Eswatini**

This chapter presents the main benefits of the RPL policy development intervention in Eswatini. The benefits of RPL exist at several levels (individual, employer, education and training provider, country) and the main ones are presented here.

### **3.1. Benefits for Individuals and for Eswatini**

#### **Access to Formal Education and Training – Promoting Lifelong Learning**

By providing an opportunity to successful applicants to achieve a qualification, without having to go through the traditional education and training formal system, RPL also provides them with an opportunity to access this formal education and training system at a later stage. RPL provides all individuals, with non-formal and informal learning outcomes, with another route to a qualification. This qualification then provides the right for successful RPL applicants to start or resume studies. RPL therefore mainly benefit young adults and adults self-learners. It provides an opportunity for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, or those with non-traditional learning experiences, to have their learning outcomes from experience recognised in a formal context.

RPL is a strong promoter of lifelong learning because it is a positive approach whereby what is put forward is what individuals know and can do, therefore creating motivation to engage in further learning, throughout life. This leads to personal and professional growth. RPL also allows individuals to bypass redundant training and education requirements and focus on acquiring new skills and competences, therefore creating motivation to resume learning on a regular basis, and to acquire skills and competences relevant to their career goals.

All in all, RPL helps remove barriers to education, training and learning, making it more accessible for adults, working professionals, and those with learning experiences that are not associated with the formal learning system.

### **Access to the Labour Market and Workforce Development**

RPL has double currency for individuals, and for the country. It provides an opportunity to (re)enter the formal education and training system as seen above, and it makes easier access to, or retention of, a job. By making skills and competences visible, it helps addressing skills and competences shortages and mismatches in the labour market. Individual workers are placed in the most appropriate job according to their skills and competences because they are made visible through a qualification, or a certificate of labour market competences.

### **Career Progression**

RPL allows individuals to demonstrate their skills and competences to employers, potentially leading to career advancement opportunities.

RPL also allows self-workers to demonstrate their skills and competences to potential customers, therefore allowing them to develop their business, and contribute as well to the economy.

## **3.2. Benefits Mainly for individuals and employers**

### **Saving Time and Cost**

RPL may allow to shortcut formal education and training programmes, and therefore allowing individuals – and their employers if they have one – to save time and cost.

RPL allows individuals to directly demonstrate their skills and competences, potentially reducing the need for additional formal education or training.

### **Mobility**

RPL can facilitate international recognition of skills and competences because they become documented in a qualification. If individuals have the desire to become occupationally and/or geographically mobile, RPL makes it easier.

This is particularly important in occupations where skills and competences are transferable and recognised globally, and across borders in particular.

Harmonisation with partner countries (e.g., from SADC, AU) will therefore be facilitated.

### **Meeting Diverse Learning Styles**

RPL acknowledges and accommodates different learning styles, recognising that individuals acquire skills and competences through various means beyond traditional classroom settings.

## **3.3. Benefits Mainly for Eswatini (and employers)**

## **Inclusivity and Diversity**

RPL promotes inclusivity by recognising the diverse range of learning experiences and learning pathways individuals may have followed. It acknowledges the value of self-learning and experiential learning regardless of where or how the corresponding learning outcomes were acquired, thus promoting diversity in education and training systems. RPL acknowledges the skills and competences of individuals from various backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences.

## **Aligning with Industry Needs**

RPL allows for a more dynamic and responsive education and training system by aligning qualifications with the evolving needs of industry sectors and occupations.

It ensures that individuals are equipped with the most relevant and up-to-date skills and competences, so that it prepares the future of the labour market in Eswatini (e.g., innovation, skills and competences, twin transition (digital and green)).

## **Social Equity**

RPL contributes to social equity by acknowledging and valuing the diverse learning experiences of individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic background, and by providing currency to the corresponding learning outcomes.

## **4. Policy Issues – Rationale for RPL in Eswatini**

This chapter presents a diagnosis (policy issues) of the general situation in Eswatini mainly in relation to education, training, and the labour market in order to provide a rationale for developing an RPL system, broad in scope and inclusive in nature.

### **4.1. Qualifications vs. Skills and Competences**

Skills and competences refer to what people know or can do and how they mobilise their knowledge, skills and competences to achievement a result, especially in an occupational context, at the workplace as it were. A qualification is a document describing these abilities. Qualifications populate the qualifications framework, which is a classification device. In Eswatini, the mismatch between what individuals know and can do is an issue, especially in the labour market.

This happens for self-learners who have invested in skills and competences, most of the time through practice, but have no document to substantiate them. There is strong evidence that self-learning – a.k.a. non-formal and informal learning (NFIL) – is massive and that competences are plenty in Eswatini, which means that individuals (workers in particular) have skills and competences but cannot reap the full benefits from them because their skills and competences are not made visible in a qualification. Situations have even been described in Eswatini whereby workers, who have acquired their skills and competences in a non-formal and informal context, cannot certify their work and must ask a colleague with a duly recognised qualification to sign them off upon delivery of their work. This clearly limits the possibility for workers with undocumented skills and competences to develop their business and to contribute to the country development and wealth.

In addition, since Eswatini witnesses high unemployment and a high concentration of employment in low value-added activities such as subsistence agriculture, there are little opportunities to fight the relatively high incidence of poverty.

### **4.2. Lack of Access to Education and Training Opportunities – Overall Low Completion Rates**

This also resonates with another clear issue with most education and training policies, and RPL in particular, which is the lack of availability of opportunities for accessing a qualification pathway. This starts with formal education and training, of which many young people are excluded (only 30% of the population have completed upper secondary education, not even half have completed junior secondary education), and this continues with RPL that is not really in place in Eswatini, despite being a promising avenue.

Indeed, there is strong evidence that skills and competences are there in Eswatini. However they are not visible.

This is where RPL finds its main theoretical and practical justification: RPL is another route to qualification, for individuals with skills and competences that are not recognised in a document yet.

RPL should be open to all sectors of education, from general education to technical vocational education and training and to higher education.

#### **4.3. Lack of Awareness of Alternative Routes to Qualifications**

In this context where a qualification would, at the same time, address issues related to education/training levels and to success in the labour market, there are issues related to the potential lack of awareness and information regarding RPL. Many individuals may not be aware of the RPL process. For instance, the urbanisation rate of Eswatini is low (less than a quarter of the population live in a city), and information is not disseminated enough to rural areas.

In Eswatini, the RPL approach is only available in the higher education system (Eswatini Higher Education Council, ESHEC) and there is already evidence that many individuals are not aware of the RPL process and, more importantly, they are not aware of the benefits RPL offers in terms of gaining formal recognition for their non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

There is a need to increase awareness and provide accurate information about RPL, and its benefits, to potential applicants.

#### **4.4. Lack of Harmonisation of RPL Across Different Higher Education Institution**

Efforts to harmonise higher education systems have not been able to address the challenge coming from the different approaches to RPL that exist in Eswatini.

Potential applicants are faced with different options for entering the RPL and have little information about the different RPL processes.

#### **4.5. Limited Access**

In Eswatini, several factors may prevent access to effective qualification pathways. Oftentimes, income and gender-based inequalities, poor relevance of school curricula to the labour market, lack of support for a smooth school-to-work transition, including provision of relevant technical and vocational education and training are keeping many individuals away from achieving a relevant qualification. Access to RPL as a second chance of qualification may be limited to. Additional factors may add to marginalisation of disadvantaged groups – such as geographical location, or lack of support structures and guidance service – creating additional barriers for some groups of the population.

There is a need for strategies to make RPL processes more accessible to a wider range of individuals, and for the RPL system to address the issues of equity and fairness in RPL, including how to ensure that the process is inclusive and accessible to all individuals from diverse backgrounds.

#### **4.6. Quality and Consistency of Assessment**

There are concerns about the quality and consistency of RPL assessments, including variations in assessment methods, criteria, and qualification standards across different institutions or [team of] assessors.

There is a need to develop guidelines or frameworks to ensure the reliability and validity of RPL assessments, and the recognition of the outcomes of this process (e.g., full-fledge qualification, partial qualification, credits).

#### **4.7. Recognition by Employers and Institutions**

Despite the quality assurance that is always associated with the RPL process, individuals obtaining recognition through the awarding of a qualification (or similar outcomes) at the end of the RPL process may still face challenges in having this newly acquired qualification accepted as a proof of competence by

key stakeholders, and employers or education and training institution in particular (i.e., societal recognition).

There is a need to explore strategies to enhance the recognition of qualification awarded at the end of an RPL process in the labour market and the education and training system.

#### **4.8. Alignment with Industry Needs**

RPL processes using qualification standards inherited from the formal education and training system, they may not necessarily align with the evolving needs of industry sectors, leading to mismatches between recognised learning outcomes and actual labour market expectations.

There is a need for the RPL stakeholders to work hands in hands with the stakeholders of the formal education and training so that qualification standards are updated on a regular basis to improve the alignment between qualification content and industry needs to enhance the relevance and value of qualification awarded at the end of an RPL process.

#### **4.9. Professional Development for RPL Guidance Officers and Assessors**

There may be a lack of trained guidance officers and assessors with the necessary expertise. Guidance officers provide guidance before, during and after the RPL process. Assessors conduct RPL assessments.

A final problem statement could therefore focus on the elaboration of professional development programmes or resources for RPL professionals to enhance their skills and competences in assessing prior learning outcomes.

## **5. Policy Statements**

This chapter outline the main principles, procedures, and guidelines for recognising individuals' prior learning experiences, regardless of where or how the corresponding learning outcomes were acquired.

### **5.1. Target Groups of the RPL Policy**

RPL is accessible to the entire population of Eswatini provided they have left initial education and training for more than a year.

The priority target group of Eswatini for its RPL policy is composed of all the individuals with learning outcomes, skills and competences that do not have the corresponding qualification to substantiate these skills and competences ((e.g., full qualification, partial qualification, certificates, credentials, micro-credential)).

RPL is also open to individuals that have achieved a qualification in the past but have the desire to change career.

### **5.2. Targeted Education and Training Sectors**

All education and training sectors are open to RPL, from general education to technical vocational education and training and to higher education.

### **5.3. Fairness and Equity**

Eswatini recognises and values diverse learning experiences and acknowledges that individuals may acquire skills and competences in all different learning environment, whether formal, non-formal, or informal.

Eswatini is committed to ensuring fairness and equity in the assessment and recognition of prior learning outcomes for all individuals seeking validation and recognition.

### **5.4. Inclusiveness**

Attention will be given in particular to vulnerable groups (e.g., migrants, returning migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, People with disabilities) with discrepancies between their actual level of skills and competences and the qualification they possess (or not).

RPL will facilitate gender mainstreaming, to the extent that it will allow access to all qualifications and all occupations regardless of gender.

RPL aims at being fully inclusive to the extent that it provides a second chance of qualification for all.

#### **5.5. Transparent Assessment Procedures**

The assessment procedures for recognising all prior learning outcomes will be transparent, accessible, and clearly communicated to all applicants.

Applicants will have access to information regarding the types of evidence accepted, assessment criteria, and the appeals procedure.

#### **5.6. Validation of Learning Outcomes against Standards**

Prior learning outcomes are validated against widely agreed pre-defined qualification standards (or amended occupational standards).

This assessment and validation process will be conducted by assessors, who are experts in the field and may come from the world of education, the world of work and/or the world of RPL.

#### **5.7. Individualised Assessment**

Each applicant's prior learning will be assessed on an individual basis, taking into account their unique experiences, contexts, and the relevance of their learning to the qualification being sought.

Collective assessment may be organised under particular circumstances, but the RPL process remains on individualised assessment.

#### **5.8. Recognition of Diverse Learning Experiences**

A broad range of learning experiences is accepted for assessment in the context of RPL. This includes work experience, volunteering, self-directed study, military service, work for not-for profit organisation, and activity in the private sphere.

All pieces of evidence will be accepted to substantiate the skills and competences acquired non-formally and informally.

#### **5.9. Quality Assurance**

In order to maintain high standards in the assessment, validation and recognition process, it will be regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure consistency, reliability, and validity.

#### **5.10. Appeals Process**

Applicants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their prior learning assessment and validation will have the right to appeal. The assessors remain the only decision makers in relation to the final decision of awarding a qualification. Therefore, the appeals process may only concern technical or administrative aspects of the evaluation process. It will be clearly outlined, and applicants will have access to support and guidance throughout the process.

#### **5.11. Continued Professional Development of Assessors**

Assessors involved in the recognition of prior learning outcomes will receive appropriate training, professional development, and ongoing support to ensure they have the necessary skills and competences to conduct assessments effectively and fairly.

#### **5.12. Promotion of RPL**

RPL will be amplified and actively promoted so that all layers of the population are aware, and properly informed, about this opportunity to facilitate access to formal education and training, enhance workforce skills and competences, and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities.

#### **5.13. Collaboration with Stakeholders**

All relevant stakeholders, including employers, industry bodies, community organisations, and education and training providers, will be invited early in the process of designing the RPL system, in order to ensure that our RPL policies and procedures are responsive to the needs of learners and of the labour market.

## **6. Principles of RPL Policy**

### **6.1. Broad Principles of RPL Policy**

RPL practices need to be based on agreed principles and values of human development, the ESQF and lifelong learning. RPL should:

- Be inclusive, equitable and sensitive to the social context of applicants. It should also take into consideration factors such as informal learning backgrounds and historical disadvantages and barriers.
- Be learner-centred and developmental adopting a non-deficit approach to skills and competences. Applicants must be credited for what they know and not penalised for what they do not know. Although assessment is central, RPL is also a learning process.
- Complement rather than compete with education and training. The two systems (education and training and RPL) are co-dependent and need to be addressed simultaneously e.g. through the development of new qualifications relevant to the labour-market. The National Policy document should be clear and states for example: "RPL is an important partner for the growing provision of quality education and training for all".
- Protect the integrity of qualifications standards, the qualifications system and education/training institutions.
- Be oriented to qualifications that have currency and value in society, especially in the labour market for employers.
- Enshrine consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure that practices develop in line with information related to labour market needs  
... and helps develop a sense of ownership.
- Encourage the development of the TVET and HE systems, whilst evaluating its own impact on society and the economy and its articulation with other parts of the education system and industry.
- Encourage the registration of all qualifications capable of award via RPL on the NQF.
- Be set at the same standard as formal education and training provision.
- Promote qualifications and credit for unit standards issued on the basis of the training and the RPL system to have the same currency and value.

### **6.2. Operating Principles for RPL**

The optimal functioning of a labour market requires competent individuals. Qualifications, registered on the NQF, signal that the holder has demonstrated skills and competences in specific occupational activities. In the context of the NQF, RPL can be used to:

- Obtain full qualifications that have currency in society as a whole and the labour market in particular.
- Obtain partial qualifications in the form of unit standards or credits, which can be augmented to full qualification in an agreed time period.
- Gain access to a learning programme (as an alternative to entry requirements based solely on educational attainment in the formal system).
- Gain exemption from part of a training programme.

The following principles represent *prerequisites* for the effective implementation of RPL and are based on an acceptance that RPL carries implications beyond its own boundaries:

- Qualifications (or similar tools such as credits toward a qualification) and skill/competence-based unit standards form the nexus of RPL.
- Industry involvement and commitment to the development of qualifications and unit standards that truly reflect the human resource development requirements of the Eswatini economy.
- Education and training (especially VET) provision will need updating in terms of infrastructure, qualifications, curricula and programmes, teaching quality, relevance to the needs of industry, modes of provision, assessment, and entry and exit points.
- RPL will need to have a clear workplace focus, whilst also encouraging further learning.
- Employers will need to plan for workforce development based on RPL and take account of demands for increased remuneration that are likely to result from successful RPL.
- The relationship between skill/competence-based unit standards and existing education and training curricula and delivery needs to be very clearly conceptualised in standards.
- All RPL providers (e.g., employers, colleges, private training organisations) will need to be NQF-accredited and equipped with guidelines, procedures and documentation to manage RPL in accordance with national imperatives e.g. applications, mentoring and advice, timelines, fees, assessment strategies and methods, recording results, perhaps appeals and quality assurance.
- Capacity will be needed at a range of levels – not only in industry, but also in education, training and skills and competences development, a guidance system, well-trained accredited assessors drawn from existing bodies in industry and education, mentors.
- High quality support materials for RPL will be needed e.g. application processes, guidelines for portfolio preparation, assessment instruments and materials, evidence requirements.
- RPL will need a firm financial base. This will require the Government to develop funding models and allocate resources for RPL within which providers can develop and implement their own funding strategies.

## 7. The RPL Process – Operationalisation

This chapter presents the operationalisation of the RPL process for individual applicants.

### 7.1. Overview

Whilst RPL can vary according to purpose e.g. whether summative or formative, whether for access or credit at different levels and in different sectors – a general process flow should be delineated; from documented learning outcomes, skills and competences to certification of skills and competences and delivery of a qualification (or similar: e.g., credits, exemptions).

In most countries the RPL process is composed of phases, generically defined as follows:

- Preliminary step: Information and guidance
- Identification
- Documentation
- Assessment
- Certification

The coherence and articulation between phases are essential for the preparation and progress of the candidate. RPL is individual-centred and reliable information is key to guide candidates towards well-



grounded perspectives, support their path through assessment and certification and provide advice concerning further learning pathways and outcomes. For most candidates RPL is a matter of self-esteem and a demonstration of capability to take a new opportunity, which cannot to be missed / failed.

## 7.2. Definition

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), 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.

In short 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.

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.

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 competence or a set of competences, 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 that 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.

## 7.3. Key Contextual Operationalisation Steps

The different stages an individual applicant goes through when engaging in RPL may be summarised in six steps of unequal duration:

- Initial information and guidance, and decision to apply,
- Administrative registration of the individual applicant by the RPL authority,
- Pre-screening by the RPL authority (eligibility),
- Preparatory work by the applicant for final assessment (including for instance elaborating a portfolio of competences),
- Assessment as such (or final assessment, including assessors reviewing all the pieces of evidence and the material provided by the applicant)<sup>1</sup>,
- Validation and certification

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”. The full RPL process is presented in Tale 1.

**Table 1. Operationalisation of the RPL Process for Applicants**

Stages	Purposes
Initial information and guidance	Greeting learners (potential applicants)
	Information and guidance to the potential applicant (comprehensive, with information about the benefits, the process and its potential duration)

<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 document will call this stage “final assessment”.

	Identification of the evidence to substantiate claim for application (partly with RPL staff)
	Decision of the individual to apply
Administrative registration	Provision of the administrative form
	Guidance 1 (light)
	Handover of the administrative form by the applicant
	Waiting time (Decision to accept the application by the RPL staff)
Application screening and eligibility	Guidance 2 (intermediate, including advice about evidence gathering)
	Handover of the eligibility portfolio
	Eligibility interview
	Waiting time (Decision to send the applicant to the assessment by RPL staff)
Preparation of the final assessment	Understanding what the final assessment is about
	Elaborating a portfolio of competences, and/or documenting learning outcomes
Assessment (of learning outcomes and competences)	Guidance 3 (comprehensive, especially concerning the preparation to the assessment)
	Handover of the portfolio of [self-analysed] competences.
	Waiting time (Analysis of the portfolio of competences by assessor(s))
	Waiting time (Convening notice send to applicants)
	Supplementary assessment (see Box 11)
	Interview with the panel of assessors
Certification (of competences)	Waiting time (Validation of the learning outcomes and competences)
	Waiting time (Making and stamping of the qualification) – Recording of outcome
	Awarding of a qualification to successful applicants.
	Explaining the reasons for failure to unsuccessful applicants.
	Suggestions for further practice, or formal education and training (top up learning).

#### 7.4. The Key Step – Assessment

Assessment may rely on several non-mutually exclusive approaches:

- Portfolio of competences.
- Practical test in a simulated working environment.
- Observation in a real working environment.
- Written examinations, including essays.
- Oral Examinations.
- Interview(s).
- Professional conversation or interview with the assessor(s).
- Challenge test.
- Case study, with a convincing narrative.
- A combination of any of the above (typically a practical hand-on test with a conversation with the assessors at the same time).
- Final jury/panel (always advisable regardless of the options chosen from the above).

Not all approaches are suitable for all target groups: illiterate people may not be able to build a portfolio of competences, even if modern approaches allow recording of all kinds (e.g. photographs, video, drawings).

## 8. Roles and Responsibilities of Main Role-players in Relation to RPL

This chapter identifies all the stakeholders in the RPL system.

### 8.1. RPL stakeholders

The list of potential stakeholders is composed of the following. They should all be informed about the steps being made in relation to RPL and invited to comment on them.

#### Government Ministries

- Labour
- Education
- Labour and Vocational Training,
- Tertiary education
- Research
- Immigration
- Social Services
- Defence
- Industry

#### Employers

- Small Business Owners
- Industries
- Human Resource Departments
- Managers
- Entrepreneurs

#### Workers

- Employed
- Underemployed
- Unemployed
- Un-certified workers in the workplace
- Certified workers in the workplace

#### Students/Learners

- Families (parents organisations)
- Persons with Disabilities

#### Sector Council

#### Unions / Syndicates / Organised Labour

- Shop Stewards
- Union Leaders

#### Education

- Junior
- Senior
- Tertiary
- Polytechnics
- Tertiary education
- Private Education Institutions
- Apprenticeship / Artisans
- On the job training providers

#### TVET

- Training centres

#### Associations

- Professional Associations
- Technological Associations
-

## Certification Boards and Regulatory Bodies

### RPL Facilitators

- Advisors
- Assessors
- Portfolio Facilitators
- Content Experts

### Career Counselling

- Guidance Counsellors
- Employment

### Traditional Knowledge Keepers

### Advocacy Groups/Associations

### Interpreters/Associations

### Universities

- Deans
- Admissions

### Researchers

### Consultants

### Military

### Prisons

## **8.2. Key RPL Stakeholders**

The key RPL stakeholders, and their role, are:

- Employers - Create an environment that is conducive to RPL
- RPL Providers - Provide RPL services that comply with statutory requirements.
- RPL Applicants - Participate in the RPL process and provide appropriate evidence to prove learning outcomes, skills and competences.
- RPL guidance officers – Support applicants.
- RPL Assessors – Subject specialists in occupational fields

## **8.3. The Role of the Authority Overseeing RPL**

The different steps the Authority in charge of RPL should take to establish an RPL system may include:

- Establish a communication policy, inform about objectives and benefits, and reach out to the most in need stakeholders, whether they be individuals, employers, or organisations.
- Fund raise.
- 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).

- Integrate universities and education stakeholders in the policy framework.
- Design the institutional framework (e.g., identify harbouring institution for the RPL system).
- Identify priority needs.
- Gauge commitment among stakeholders, and promote those who are definitely in.
- Plan for Monitoring and Evaluation.
- Create regulatory tools.
- Decide on eligibility criteria (to have the right to apply for assessment).
- Decide on assessment methods, with quality assurance.
- Decide on final outcomes of the RPL process (exemptions, credits, qualification, certificate).
- Consult and decide on pilots (preferably low hanging fruits, to attract investors and more stakeholders).
- Organise [vertical] pilots, either sector targeted or holistic according to the priority needs.
- Train staff and RPL practitioners, advisors and assessors in the first place.
- Identify top up education and training options, for unsuccessful RPL applicants that needs additional learning to meet the qualification standards.
- Elaborate learning outcomes and standards, following and initial assessment of the adequacy of learning outcomes for an RPL process (many programmes claim they are based on learning outcomes, but they are not actually learning outcomes – time consuming in the latter case).
- 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...).
- Evaluate impact on formal education and training system (e.g. modularisation, curriculum).
- Compile results from Monitoring and Evaluation of the pilots.
- Organising the debate among key stakeholders for improving the RPL system.
- Feed back into the RPL system.
- Decide on a critical mass for implementing in a sector.
- Up scale.
- Learn from further Monitoring and Evaluation and feed back into the RPL system.
- Improve the education and training system so that it complements the RPL system (e.g., modular provision of formal education and training so that unsuccessful applicants may organise their top-up education and training).
- If at all possible, feed back into the formal TVET sector so that all TVET stakeholders benefit from the way the assessment is organised for learning outcomes acquired through experience.

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.

These different steps of the public action are not to be confused with the pathway of individual applicants must follow when engaging in RPL. For the sake of simplicity, the former is designated as the “supply” and the latter as the “demand” in this document.

What the government has to do (the supply) and what the individual applicants have to do (the demand) are always confused in most presentations done in publications, especially by international organisations. It is often the case indeed that “fund raising” or “communication” appear as key steps in the RPL process, but no individual applicant needs to know about those issues. Rather, they need to have a clear of what they will have to go through in order to complete their RPL journey. This is addressed in the next section.

## **9. Moderation and Quality Assurance in RPL**

Quality assurance in VET and RPL hinges on the use of unit standards and qualifications to inform assessment. The role of moderators (internal and external) is to sample and verify that all aspects of RPL adhere to accepted standards and principles.

To instil confidence over time, all RPL activities will need to comply with Eswatini quality assurance and accreditation requirements as set out in existing policy documents. However, over-regulation of RPL can stifle creativity and innovation, especially in the early stages. Therefore a light touch is recommended at the outset for notions of quality to be derived from contextual practice, rather than being imposed upon it.

## **10. Implementation Strategy for RPL**

### **10.1. Characteristics of the Strategy**

Although policy is relatively fixed, an implementation strategy evolves. However, the following characteristics should typify the RPL implementation strategy. It should be:

- Pragmatic
- Incremental
- Iterative
- Enabling and consensus building

These characteristics can be discussed in greater detail in a section regarding strategy, with

### **10.2. Principles Governing the Strategy – Getting and Keeping Everybody on Board**

The principles governing the strategy are:

- Pragmatic – Realistic – Fit-for-purpose – Implementable
- Iterative – Continuous Learning Informing Forward Movement
- Enabling and Consensus-Oriented
- Implications of Growing RPL in Eswatini

### **10.3. Road Map – Phased Action Plan**

The road map may be designed around the following phases:

- Phase 1: Scoping, model building and Preparing the Environment
  - o Phase 1a: Scoping Existing Practices
  - o Phase 1b. Model building and preparing the environment
- Phase 2. Establishing an institutional framework (a legislative and a regulatory framework) and a governance system
- Phase 3. Modelling RPL (assessment, quality assurance, standards, introduction of ICT)
- Phase 4. Developing guidelines (especially for practitioners) and monitoring and evaluation system

- Phase 5. Piloting (vertical pilots)
- Phase 6. Scaling up for the entire country (implementation plan and timelines)

## **11. Risk and opportunities**

### **11.1. Risks**

The potential risks are:

- High level: contradictory intent of agencies (incoherent policy, obstacles to cohesion)
- Lack of commitment of stakeholders
- Conflicting stakeholders
- Delay in publishing legal texts (laws, bylaws, regulations)
- RPL staff (assessors, guidance officers) not convinced nor properly trained, or burden on staff
- RPL stigma
- String attachment of the population to formal education and training

### **11.2. Mitigation strategy**

The mitigation strategy will be developed, and strategies will be elaborated to address the risks if they arise

### **11.3. Opportunities**

The opportunities for the RPL system are plenty, and they relate in particular to:

- Fighting poverty.
- Addressing migration issues, including returning migrations.
- Optimal skills and competences utilisation.
- Increased the size of the formal economy.
- Promote lifelong learning.
- Long term impact (e.g., confidence, self-esteem, as such and as predictors of future employment and economic development).
- Double currency of RPL qualifications, in the formal education and training system and in the labour market (for occupational mobility, promotion, pay raise, decent work).

## **12. Monitoring and Evaluation**

A monitoring and evaluation system will be proposed with:

- Objectives and indicators
- Monitoring and evaluation relevant to the RPL system and approach, interoperable with the M&E of the NQF
- Data for monitoring
- Monitoring for evaluation
- Opportunities for econometric modelling, provided data have been collected

## **13. Piloting RPL**

Piloting RPL is a necessary condition for future success. A vertical approach to piloting RPL will be implemented.

A vertical approach, in this context, consists of piloting RPL in a small number of industry sectors or trade jobs, but to do it extensively. Extensive piloting means to address all the issues, and draft all the relevant documentation, from the very bottom to the very top; from the choice of assessment standards to the adequate selection of applicants, with the elaboration of an eligibility condition, and to the Monitoring and Evaluation of the full pilot. This also means assessment of the eligible applicants, training of the guidance officers and of the assessors and drafting of the relevant manuals, validation, certification of competences and follow up on the labour market to evaluate the performance of recognition of prior learning graduates, compared to a control group (group of individuals with same characteristics but not having engaged in recognition of prior learning, or having failed at it).

A horizontal approach would be to pilot recognition of prior learning in many sectors but without piloting the full process. It is not recommended for policy learning.

The industry sectors, or sub-sectors, which could organise a pilot are the ones where there is evidence that a fair fraction of the workers have skills and competences but no qualifications. Industry (sub-)Sectors that have a tradition of working on qualifications, qualifications framework and/or RPL should be selected first.

Industry (sub-)sectors that are not composed of jobs mainly occupied by male workers should also be selected first, for a better gender balance.

As often in piloting activities, the choice should be based on the easiness of implementing an RPL system on a “small” scale.

The different steps for organising the pilot are:

- Choice of qualifications,
- Sourcing (selection of applicants),
- Identification of qualification standards,
- Preparation of guidance officers,
- Preparation of assessors,
- Initial information and guidance, and decision to apply,
- Administrative registration of the individual applicant by the RPL authority,
- Pre-screening by the RPL authority (eligibility),
- Preparatory work by the applicant for final assessment (including for instance elaborating a portfolio of competences),
- Assessment as such (or final assessment, including assessors reviewing all the pieces of evidence and the material provided by the applicant)<sup>2</sup>,
- Validation and certification

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<sup>2</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 document will call this stage “final assessment”.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Glossary of ACQF 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>

#### **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 competencies; 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 competencies 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.

## **Prior learning**

The knowledge, know-how and/or competencies 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 a candidate 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.