



Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

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Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| CAT | Credit Accumulation and Transfer |
| CESM | Classification of Educational Subject Matter |
| CHE | Council on Higher Education |
| FET | Further Education and Training |
| HEQSF | Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework |
| HoD | Head of Department |
| NQF | National Qualifications Framework |
| RPL | Recognition of Prior Learning |
| SAQA | South African Qualifications Authority |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UL | University of Limpopo |

Glossary

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| <i>Advanced standing</i> | Status granted to a student for admission to studies at a higher NQF level than what their prior formal studies would allow. |
| <i>Appropriateness:</i> | The method of assessment is suited to the performance being assessed. |
| <i>Assessment:</i> | The process in which evidence of a learner's achievement is gathered, interpreted and evaluated against agreed criteria in order to make diagnostic, formative and summative judgements. |
| <i>Assessment criteria:</i> | The criteria used to guide learning and the evaluation of a candidate. Assessment criteria relate to the learning outcome and depict the quality and the range of performance against which a candidate is evaluated and assessed. |
| <i>Assessor:</i> | A person with the appropriate qualifications and competencies employed to conduct high-quality internal and external assessment for specific accredited qualifications, part-qualifications or professional development courses against a set of pre-determined criteria. Assessors could include a variety of appropriately qualified persons such as lecturers, assessors, and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) specialists, who are all qualified RPL practitioners. |
| <i>Candidate:</i> | A person whose performance is being assessed by the assessor. |
| <i>Consistent:</i> | The same assessor would make the same judgment again in similar circumstances |
| <i>Council on Higher Education (CHE):</i> | An independent statutory body responsible for advising the Minister of Higher |

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| | <p>Education and Training on all Higher Education policy issues, and for quality assurance in Higher Education. The CHE is the council for quality assurance in Higher Education, mandated by the NQF Act (Act 67 of 2008) to achieve the objectives of the NQF and to develop and manage the HEQSF</p> |
| <p><i>Credible Assessment:</i></p> | <p>The assessment process meets all the assessment principles and is designed to enhance the quality of a programme leading to a qualification. Credible assessment instils public confidence in the Institution's qualifications.</p> |
| <p><i>Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT):</i></p> | <p>Credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. It is the formal awarding of credits obtained for modules at another higher education institution that have been officially deemed to be equivalent to a module at the University of Limpopo.</p> |
| <p><i>Criterion Referenced Assessment:</i></p> | <p>The practice of assessing a person's performance against an agreed set of criteria, e.g., specific outcomes. The NQF relates to criterion-referenced assessment, which is a form of outcomes-based education.</p> |
| <p><i>Direct:</i></p> | <p>The activities in the assessment mirror the conditions of actual performance as closely as possible.</p> |
| <p><i>Exemption:</i></p> | <p>Following an RPL process, exemption will be granted for modules deemed to have been obtained from prior learning. Note that credits will not be awarded for</p> |

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| | exempted modules. (Cross-reference with “Recognition of Modules”) |
| <i>Fairness:</i> | The method of assessment does not present any barriers to achievements, which are not related to the evidence. |
| <i>Formal Learning:</i> | Formal learning refers to the structured and intentional learning process that takes place within an organised and recognized educational system, such as TVET colleges, universities, vocational training centres, and other formal training programs. Formal learning follows a specific curriculum and is designed to lead to certification. |
| <i>Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF):</i> | The sub-framework of the NQF for Higher Education that is developed and managed by the CHE. |
| <i>Informal Learning:</i> | Informal learning occurs through daily life experiences, interactions, and self-directed exploration |
| <i>Integration into work or learning:</i> | Evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process where this is appropriate and feasible. |
| <i>Learning Outcome:</i> | The type of learning that a student must achieve, or demonstrate, in order to have mastered the programme, qualification or part qualification. Learning outcomes must describe, in concrete terms, the quality of learning in alignment with the NQF level descriptors that a student should achieve at the end of the programme/module. |
| <i>Lifelong learning:</i> | Learning that takes place in all contexts in life - formally, non-formally and informally. It includes learning behaviours and obtaining knowledge; understanding; attitudes; |

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| | values and competences for personal growth, social and economic wellbeing, democratic citizenship, cultural identity and employability. |
| <i>Moderation:</i> | A process for making judgements on the quality and results of agreed standards with the purpose of confirming and/or modifying the assessment judgements to make them valid, reliable, fair and comparable with similar assessments in previous instances and places. Moderation may take place either through internal moderators, or through external moderators. |
| <i>Moderator:</i> | An appropriately qualified and competent person employed by the Institution to undertake the moderation process of pre-evaluated assessments. |
| <i>Non-formal learning:</i> | Non-formal learning includes structured learning outside traditional educational settings, such as workshops, seminars, and short courses. |
| <i>Performance:</i> | Includes skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes, and the ability to transfer these to new situations. |
| <i>Professional Development Course (Short course):</i> | A short learning programme through which a learner may or may not be awarded credits towards a qualification or a part qualification, depending on the purpose of the programme |
| <i>Recognition of modules:</i> | Where module equivalence has been granted through an RPL process, the credits are recognised but not awarded. A student will thus graduate with a lower credit total than those required for the |

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| | qualification. (Cross-reference with exemption) |
| <i>Recognition of prior learning (RPL):</i> | The recognition of learning acquired through various processes such as formal learning, informal learning and non-formal learning that are equivalent to the learning outcomes expected for admission to a programme or for advanced standing. Credits are not awarded for RPL. |
| <i>Sufficient:</i> | The evidence collected establishes that all criteria have been met and that performance to the required standard can be repeated consistently. |
| <i>Systematic:</i> | Planning and recording are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that assessment is fair. |
| <i>Validity:</i> | The assessment focuses on the requirements laid down in the standard, i.e., the assessment is fit for purpose. |

1. Introduction

In alignment with its vision statement, “To be a leading African University focussed on the developmental needs of its communities and epitomising academic excellence and innovativeness”, the University of Limpopo (UL) is committed to advancing the educational needs of its communities and beyond. A large number of potential students possess considerable learning, which could legitimately be associated for equivalence to formal learning. In alignment with the transformative goals of the country and to address unfair discriminations of the past, UL firmly believes that learners should be granted access, exemption, or advanced standing, to modules, programmes, and qualifications on the basis of their skills, knowledge and professional values, which have been gained through life experiences, work and academic achievements.

2. Legislative Framework

UL aligns with the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) policy on the RPL¹. The document outlines the importance of developing and implementing an integrated quality RPL system in the education and training sector, which responds to the goals of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa. The guidelines provided by SAQA in this regard are valuable and take cognisance of the principles and values supporting the transformation of the South African education and training system.

This UL policy meets the requirements of the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014) which requires institutions to have policies in place that enable RPL to take place in a simplistic and fair manner, whilst ensuring equivalence of learning. Furthermore, the University is guided by the “Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in Higher Education” (CHE, 2016).

This policy should be read in conjunction with all University of Limpopo policies, but specifically with:

The University General Academic Rules

General Admission Requirements

The Student Access and Admissions policy

The Assessment Policy: Students Learning

¹ The South African Qualifications Authority National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning

3. Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to provide a clear framework for the University with the RPL that aligns with the Institutional goals and strategies. It provides Faculties with a basis from which to align their own specific programmes and qualifications approaches with the policy. This will enhance the quality assurance of the RPL provisioning at UL. The policy sets out a framework for co-ordinated decision making regarding RPL activities across the University by broadly describing the principles, aspirations and practices that relate to RPL.

The RPL Policy of the University is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- a) Promote equitable access to higher education by recognising and validating prior learning experiences.
- b) Facilitate lifelong learning by acknowledging the value of diverse learning experiences.
- c) Provide a fair and transparent process for assessing prior learning.
- d) Comply with the relevant South African policies and guidelines related to RPL.

4. Scope

The Policy applies to RPL applications relating to undergraduate and postgraduate studies. RPL may be considered for the following:

RPL for access to the first year of a qualification
RPL for exemption of modules within a qualification, or
RPL for advanced standing into a higher qualification.
Note that a qualification is not awarded through RPL

5. Policy Content and Guidelines

5.1 Principles

The University is committed to the principle that learning can be demonstrated in a number of settings, not merely within an educational institution.

“Recognition of prior learning refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and rigorously assessed and

moderated for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development”²

Learning could have been acquired through learning experiences other than in a formal programme or qualification. Recognition for prior learning may be described in the following categories:

- Learning acquired in a formal certified learning context. For example, a professional development course, a course offered by a professional body, enterprise or by any other provider recognised by the Institution.
- Learning acquired in a non-formal, non-certified context, such as work experience (formal or voluntary) or through partially competing programmes or courses.
- Learning acquired in an informal learning context which is learning acquired outside of an education, training or formal workplace context.

This policy intends to regulate the recognition and assessment of prior learning at UL and thereby promote a fair, consistent and standardised application of its procedures.

The University understands that it is important to adopt a holistic approach through RPL assessment, guidance and support. Below are some general guiding principles for the development and implementation of a quality RPL system:

- a) The RPL process should be accessible to all individuals who seek admission to the University, irrespective of their age, background, or previous educational qualifications.
- b) The RPL process should promote fairness and equity, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds have equal opportunities to gain recognition for their prior learning.
- c) The University will treat all RPL applicants' information with strict confidentiality, adhering to relevant data protection laws and regulations.
- d) The development of learners is the underlying purpose of RPL that facilitates the learning pathways presented by the National Qualifications Framework to ensure greater mobility and flexibility in education and training.
- e) RPL should form part of an integrated assessment system and should be conducted in accordance with the principles of validity, consistency, fairness and reliability.
- f) In promoting the national goals of lifelong learning, RPL acts as the vehicle through which previous learning and experience in a variety of contexts are formally acknowledged.

² Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education, CHE, August 2016

- g) RPL should focus on what the student has learned and not on where the learning took place
- h) RPL is awarded for knowledge and skills acquired through relevant, sufficient and current work experience, and not on the duration of work experience alone.
- i) In the case of programmes governed by professional bodies, through the RPL policy shall adhere to the rules and regulations of those bodies. As such, some programmes may not provide for RPL to be conducted for any reason.
- j) Not more than 10% of a student cohort will be admitted to a qualification by RPL.
- k) Students accessing qualifications through RPL will be monitored and supported throughout their studies to be afforded every opportunity to successfully complete their studies.
- l) No full qualifications may be obtained via the RPL route, and no more than 50% of modules required for a qualification may be exempted through RPL.

5.2. Types of RPL Provision

RPL for Access:

RPL may be used by participants with current, relevant and sufficient learning to access the first year of a qualification, should they not meet the University's normal admission requirements. No more than 10% of a cohort may access a qualification through RPL.

RPL for exemption

RPL may be offered for exemption of modules within a particular programme. Applicants will identify modules that they consider their prior learning has addressed, and the RPL process will be conducted to particularly consider these modules. No more than 50% of the credits of a qualification may be exempted through the RPL process, and these will normally not include the final year major subjects. RPL for exemption is a separate process to the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) process where credits obtained through formal learning at other institutions are awarded at the University.

RPL for Advanced Standing

RPL for advanced standing grants status to a student for admission to studies at a higher NQF level than what their prior formal studies would allow. Additionally, RPL for advanced standing may be used to evaluate whether a student may do a higher qualification in a CESM

area in which they have not formally trained. Students are not awarded the qualification they do not have, and credits are not awarded towards the higher qualification.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The UL Senate is the highest academic decision-making body at the University and is ultimately responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the RPL process.

All Executive Deans of Faculty have the responsibility to ensure the implementation of the RPL policy for access, exemption or advanced standing in all programmes within their Faculties, or in Cross-Faculty programmes, and should report to the Executive Committee of Senate. The relevant Faculty quality assurance structures for teaching and learning are responsible for the policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Directors of Schools are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the RPL policy within their Schools, engaging with relevant Departments and in reporting to the Faculty Board Committees. The Heads of Departments (HoDs) are primarily responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the RPL procedures within the policy framework. HoDs will work hand in hand with RPL practitioners within their Departments.

It is the responsibility of all academic staff to acquaint themselves with the RPL Policy of the University, and those within the Faculty and School and to effectively implement its principles and aspirations in all RPL matters.

The Centre for Academic Excellence (CAE) is responsible for overseeing the RPL processes and monitoring its implementation within the bounds of the policy. By ensuring a collaborative effort by all University staff, the quality of RPL will ensure that the University achieves its objectives aligning with the transformation of its communities.

6.1 Responsibilities of the University management

The UL management is responsible for creating an enabling the implementation of the RPL process. In so doing, management has an overall responsibility for the provision of RPL training opportunities for the staff. Management should enable and support staff through time and resources to attend the training opportunities. Management is responsible to

ensure that systems are in place to ensure that the RPL processes is implementable, from marketing to the graduation and certification of the students.

6.2 Responsibilities of the Academic Staff

All academic staff must familiarise themselves with the purpose and policy for RPL. All departments must ensure that at least one staff member from each specific programme or subject area is developed as an RPL practitioner. These academic staff members should have access to training opportunities provisioned by the University and should be supported in this area of professional development. The academic staff RPL practitioners' work should contribute towards their academic workloads, it should carry weight towards promotion opportunities and staff should be encouraged to publish research on their experiences. There should be continuous and adequate support available for RPL development. Academic staff are responsible for supporting RPL applicants, for ensuring a fair and valid assessment of the applicants' prior knowledge and skills, and for ensuring that all quality assurance measures are in place.

6.3 Responsibilities of the Administrative Staff

Administrative staff are often the point of first contact for potential RPL applicants. They provide a significant role in serving non-traditional students, including RPL candidates. All role players along the path of certifying a candidate's RPL, who may oversee requests for admission through to those involved in graduating the candidate, should be equally conversant with the purpose and processes of RPL. Equally, Faculty, School and Departmental Administrative staff should be conversant with the purpose and processes of RPL. As such, administrative staff involved in administering programmes should accept training opportunities designed to build their understanding of the needs of RPL candidates.

6.4 Responsibility of RPL Applicants

RPL applicants are responsible for applying to the University for RPL through the relevant processes. Applicants are responsible for supplying all relevant information as per request by the University for the RPL application within the required time-frames for the screening of the application. Applicants are required to work with the designated RPL practitioner to ensure that a complete portfolio of evidence is submitted timeously, and that all information is appropriately authenticated. Applicants are required to address all aspects of the RPL assessment, which may include oral assessment and portfolio-assisted assessment. Should there be an interview, RPL applicants are fully responsible for logistical

arrangements to ensure that they attend the assessment through the agreed means, either virtually or in person as determined by the Institution. RPL applicants are responsible to pay the required non-refundable RPL application fee as annually determined by the University. Payment of the RPL application fee in no way infers the success of the RPL process.

7. Process

In recognising particular forms of non-formal/informal/formal learning as contributing towards the achievement of one or more of its programmes, guidelines in line with the procedures that follow should be implemented to assess RPL candidates (Appendix 1). The Schools/Departments within each Faculty are responsible for selecting the assessment methods used (Appendix 2) to determine whether relevant skills, understanding and knowledge have been acquired.

7.1 Application and pre-screening of participants

The relevant University Divisions shall ensure that RPL is widely advertised on all of its Marketing materials, such as the Undergraduate and Postgraduate prospectuses and Calendars. Academic Administration will have procedures in place to support applicants who apply to the University for access. Applicants applying for exemption or for advanced standing must do so through the Faculty Assistant Registrar's office. Any candidate wishing to apply for assessment through RPL should submit the following details for pre-screening: Prior work experience, education and training and explain how this relates to the RPL being sought.

The Academic Administration or the Faculty Assistant Registrar (as appropriate), sends the RPL application to the Director of School, who refers it to the most relevant department aligning with the discipline area of the application. The Director of School, in collaboration with the Head of Department, appoints a Principal RPL practitioner to support and guide the process.

The Director of School informs the CAE Division who will provide guidance and support to the School throughout the process.

The Principal RPL practitioner will pre-screen the application. Where the application will not be successful, the Director of School will communicate with the applicant, furnishing reasons for the unsuccessful application. Should the pre-screening indicate a reasonable chance of

success of the application, the Principal RPL practitioner will contact the applicant and discuss the necessary processes that will take place, and the documents that are required for the assessment.

7.2 Assessment of RPL

An assessment panel is set up by the Principal RPL practitioner. It should include an assessment Chairperson (who should be another RPL practitioner within the School), and two assessors who both have discipline expertise, who are also RPL practitioners within the School (other than the Principal RPL practitioner).

The RPL assessment objective, process and timeframes are agreed upon between the applicant and the Principal RPL practitioner.

Assessment methods (Appendix 2) will be discussed and agreed upon by the applicant and the Principal RPL practitioner who will collaborate with the Assessment Panel.

Assessment criteria for the application in question will be designed and should not simply replicate those for mainstream but should accommodate the knowledge and skills gained outside the Institution in terms of their value for the programme in question.

Supporting evidence for previous work experience, education and training details; and other relevant interests or skills, references, course details, reports etc., that support the application must be submitted to the appointed RPL practitioner. All submitted documentation must be certified/authenticated. Continued engagement should take place between the RPL practitioner and the applicant until the Portfolio of Evidence has been obtained within appropriate timeframes.

Assessment takes place in alignment with agreed processes and objectives. Assessment must align with all assessment characteristics which include validity, reliability, fairness, credibility, transparency, and accountability. The assessment should advance social justice and equality and should be sensitive to the language aptitude of the applicant. The CAE monitors the assessment process.

The Chairperson of the assessment panel drafts the final report and submits it to the Head of Department. The Head of Department should moderate the assessment and determine whether the evidence provided justifies the evaluative judgments by the assessors.

The Head of Department recommends the Assessment report to the Director of School. The Director shall make recommendations about the candidate's application to the Executive Dean, who will in turn give a recommendation to the Executive Committee of Senate for consideration.

Following approval of the outcome by the Executive Committee of Senate, the Faculty will communicate the outcome to the applicant and provide the appropriate directives for registration or for the appeal of the outcome.

Applicants should have access to the normal reassessment and appeal process associated with institutional academic decisions. Applicants who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their RPL assessment have the right to appeal the decision through a formal appeal process with the Executive Dean. The Faculty will establish a standing RPL appeals committee to handle such cases impartially

All original documents should be returned to the applicant once the assessment has been completed. The Faculty should retain copies of substantiating documents, assessment materials and an Assessor's Report, for a period of ten years.

7.3. Registration Processes

The RPL status offered to an applicant is valid for 12 months from the date of notification, after which an applicant will have to restart the process should they not have proceeded with registration or exemption processes. Once notified of a successful RPL application, the student is required to abide with all registration requirements of the University. This includes payment of the full registration fees as prescribed by the University of Limpopo. Once registered, the student is a fully fledged student at the University and is required to adhere to all applicable rules, policies, and procedures.

The RPL status granted by the UL shall not be deemed transferable to any other institution of higher learning for purposes of enrolment there.

7.4. Support of the RPL student

The Director of School will appoint an RPL practitioner to monitor and support a student who has gained access through RPL, throughout their academic journey at the Institution. The RPL practitioner needs to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to provide academic as well as non-academic support such as Counselling and Development support. The RPL practitioner must report to the Director of School bi-annually on the progress made of students who have gained access through RPL.

7.5. Certification and Records Management

Certificates awarded for the completion of a qualification obtained by a candidate who was awarded entry to a programme, or exemption of modules, or advanced standing through RPL will not reflect such information. Transcripts of RPL candidates who were granted exemption of modules will reflect “Exemption” with no credit points attached. RPL applicants who were awarded the exemption of modules will thus complete the qualification with less credits than normally required for the qualification. Transcripts of RPL candidates who were awarded “advanced standing” should indicate as such for access to higher qualifications.

All RPL records and data will be kept strictly confidential with the Report and ECS outcome included in the Student File. The University will submit records of RPL achievements to the Council on Higher Education as required by the “National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning” (SAQA, 2016).

7.6. Monitoring, Review and Continuous Improvement

Faculties are responsible for monitoring the outcomes and success of the RPL process within their Faculties. A review of the quality management systems related to RPL needs to be incorporated into the scope of the programme reviews. This should include a focus on assessment methods, moderation, and support for students, curriculum review, and staff development. The CAE will continuously monitor, review and ensure continuous implementation of the RPL process within the University.

8. References

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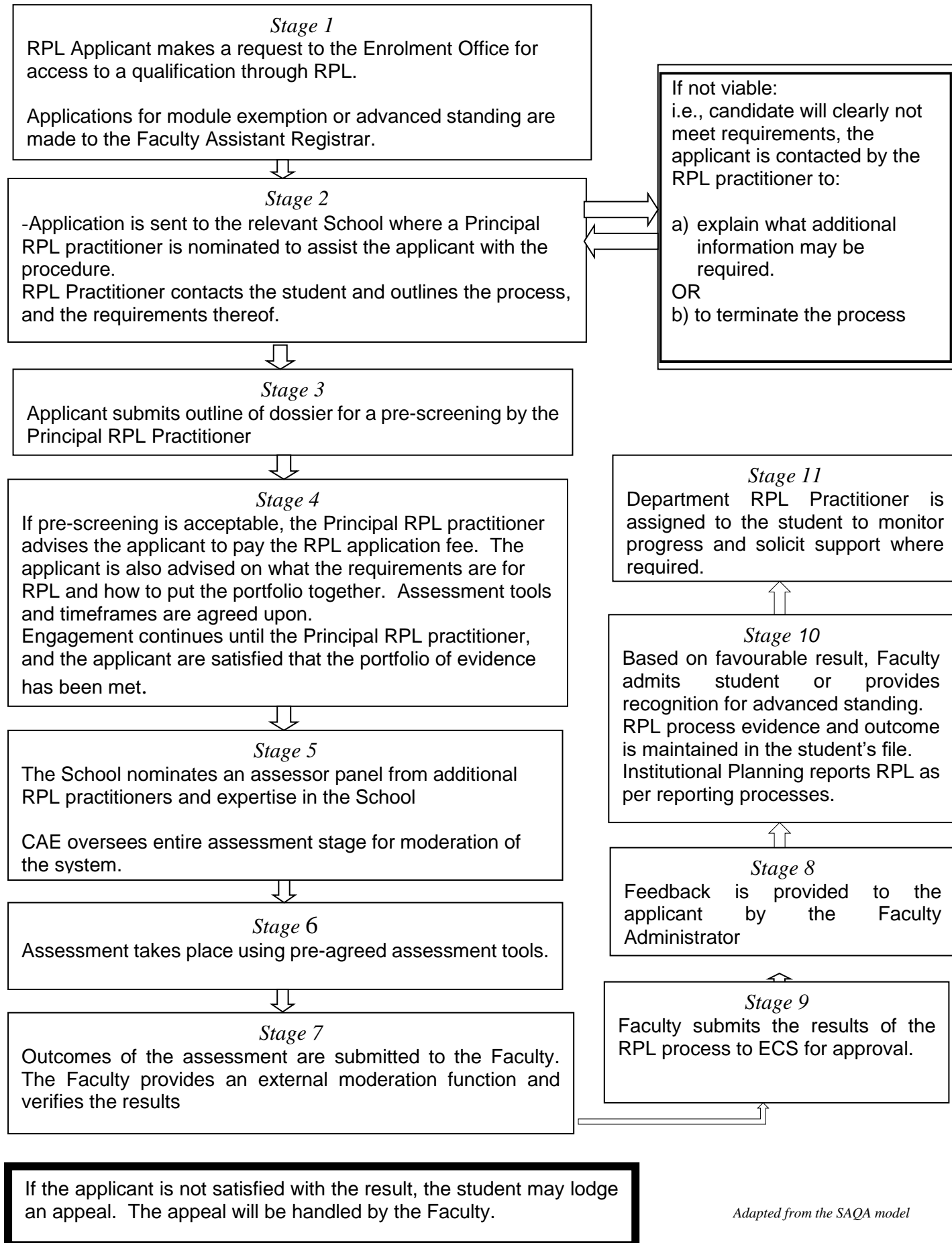
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South African Qualifications Authority (2016) National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (Original document 2013)

Appendix 1: Flow Chart of RPL Process



Adapted from the SAQA model

Appendix 2: Assessment guidelines

| Assessment Methods | Purposes and Examples |
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| Interviews | To clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning. May be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important. (May be structured or unstructured). |
| Debate | To confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument, demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject. |
| Presentation | To check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience. |
| Performance testing | To test applications of theory in a structured context in correct/safe manner. |
| Examination | To test concepts and basic skills and applications using practical examples. |
| Oral Examination | To check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms. |
| Essay | To check the quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of the ideas. |
| Examples of work done or performed or designed | To check the quality of work, relevance to RPL sought and authenticity of production. |
| Portfolio | To validate applicant's learning by providing a collection of materials that reflect prior learning and achievements. Will include own work, reflections on own practice and indirect evidence from others that are qualified to comment. The portfolio will identify relevant connection between learning and the specified or unspecified RPL sought. |
| Book review | To ensure currency and analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level. |
| Annotated literature review | To illustrate the range of reading done by the applicant and ensure appropriate coverage to fulfil subject requirements. |

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| Special Projects | May be used to meet a variety of purposes – to add greater currency to knowledge of skills, to extend scope of prior learning. |
| Report, critiques, articles | To indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in the current debate on the subject. |