GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

WITHIN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) SECTOR
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Abbreviations

NQA  Namibia Qualifications Authority
NQF  National Qualifications Framework
NTA  Namibia Training Authority
RPL  Recognition of Prior Learning
VET  Vocational Education and Training

Definitions

Prior learning refers to competences (knowledge, skills, attributes, values, beliefs etc.) that have been acquired prior to an assessment and/or recognition process. The term ‘prior’ may seem redundant in the expression ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’, as it is not possible to recognise future learning and prior learning needs to be functional in present-time. The key point is that it refers to learning outcomes prior to the assessment process; typically, non-formal and informal learning (but in some cases uncompleted periods of formal learning). In some quarters, RPL is referred to as the Recognition of Learning Outcomes or the Recognition of Current Competencies.

Assessment is the process by which academics; experts, professionals etc. decide whether an individual meets the predefined criteria for obtaining credits, exemption of academic prerequisites, partial or full qualification or any other award. It represents the end of a process for successful candidates.

A qualification is a formal outcome of an assessment process whether that is a full qualification, credits or exemptions. It is also referred to as certification. It is the official recognition of learning. A qualification confers official recognition by the authority that awards it.

Recognition is the final outcome of a well-planned RPL process and includes the process by which what is awarded to successful applicants is recognised by society as a whole, especially by employers. An RPL VET provider is an entity registered with the NTA that offers RPL services in the VET sector that lead to an NQF accredited qualification.

A RPL VET provider is an entity registered with the NTA that offers RPL services in the VET sector leading to an NQF accredited qualification.

Recognition of Prior Learning is the process by which prior learning is given a value. It is a means by which prior learning is formally identified, assessed and validated. The key terms associated with RPL are ‘prior’, i.e., learning already achieved; and ‘process’ i.e., the distinct stages of identification, assessment and certification.
A **RPL assessor** is a specialist in a specific field of study or VET qualification(s) registered with NTA whose prime responsibility is to assess RPL candidates and determine whether or not they have met the unit standard requirements of the qualification.

A **RPL moderator** is a specialist in a specific field of study or VET qualification(s) registered with NTA who moderate and checks that the process of assessment are consistent with the principles of assessment namely fairness, validity, reliability, sufficiency and currency.

A **verifier** is an external moderator, a person outside the RPL VET provider who evaluates and checks if the moderation process was done professionally and correctly.

A **mentor** is a VET Trainer with training in RPL processes and practices who advise RPL candidates in the selection of qualifications and their preparation for assessment.

**Top-up training**, also known as gap training refers to training provided to RPL candidates who have been found not yet competent in certain unit standards of a qualification. The length of the training will vary depending on the number of unit standards to be covered.

**Integrated assessment tasks** are a combination of different assessment tasks that have similar or related performance criteria based on the unit standards.
1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Guidelines
These guidelines have been developed by the NTA to guide VET Providers on how to:

- Prepare, plan, and implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within VET;
- Inform prospective RPL candidates on what they can expect from RPL and how they can actively participate in the RPL process.

Please note that guidelines for best practice for establishing credit transfer arrangements are still to be developed by the NQA in consultation with key stakeholders.

1.2 Scope of the Guidelines

- The guidelines are applicable to all RPL providers in the VET sector who offer NQF registered qualifications and awards.
- The guidelines also cover the following aspects of RPL implementation:
  - Institutional readiness for providing RPL within the VET sector;
  - Steps involved in the RPL assessment process;
  - Roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the RPL process; and
  - Monitoring and quality assurance of the RPL processes.
2. Guidelines for Implementing RPL in the VET Sector

Institutional Readiness for RPL Provision

In order to prepare the institution for the provision of RPL, prospective RPL providers need to understand what institutional arrangements need to be in place to effectively implement RPL in the VET sector. RPL Providers should conduct a detailed audit of the institution's readiness to implement RPL. The following are essential requirements for RPL implementation:

Table 1: Institutional Readiness Checklist

The table below provides a breakdown of what is required by RPL providers planning to implement RPL within the VET sector.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements for RPL VET providers</th>
<th>Description and detail of requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation with NQA and/or Registration with NTA</td>
<td>Institutions planning to provide RPL must be accredited with the NQA or registered with the NTA(^1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Institutional RPL VET arrangements | RPL VET providers must develop institutional RPL arrangements which demonstrate their capacity to offer RPL. The arrangements should be in line with the approved RPL VET Policy and Guidelines for implementing RPL and should include, as a minimum, the following:
  - RPL VET services offered
  - Modes of RPL provision
  - Entry requirements for the different modes
  - Cost of different modes of RPL
  - Quality assurance mechanisms to ensure quality RPL provision. |
| Availability of Assessors, Mentors, Moderators and Verifiers | RPL VET providers must ensure that - prior to RPL implementation - they must have or have access to registered assessors, moderators and verifiers to execute the RPL assessment. |
| Institutional RPL Support System | Institutional support system is an integral part of the whole RPL process. The support system refers to structures and systems that need to be in place to ensure that candidates get the needed support |

\(^1\) Regulations for the Registration of Training Providers (2012). Application forms to register as a Training Provider and other information available at the NTA and on the NTA website [www.nta.com.na](http://www.nta.com.na)
Throughout the RPL process, as a minimum, the following support mechanisms should be in place:

- Establishment of a RPL administrative support structure;
- Candidate selection;
- Mentoring support;
- Support during the assessment;
- Post RPL assessment support including top-up training.

### The use of registered Unit Standards and Qualifications

RPL candidates need to be assessed against unit standards and qualifications registered on the NQF.

RPL VET providers must identify unit standards and/or qualifications registered on the NQF and offered at their respective institutions for RPL.

### Information dissemination strategy

Prospective RPL candidates need to be informed on RPL matters, including RPL requirements and services available at the institution. Thus, RPL providers are encouraged to develop a marketing strategy to disseminate information on RPL. Strategy components could include:

- Information brochures;
- Press release in radio and print media;
- Inclusion of the description of RPL services in institution publications or the course prospectus;
- Networking with employers;
- Inclusion of RPL as part of the general marketing strategy.

### Selection Committee

A representative selection committee should be qualified to facilitate a transparent and fair system of selecting prospective RPL candidates consistent with the minimum entry requirements² set by the NTA.

### Record Keeping

RPL VET providers must have a system in place where adequate records are maintained for each RPL candidate. A complete and accessible file for

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² As per NTA Requirements: Level 2 – a minimum of 3 years relevant working experience; Level 3 - a minimum of 5 years relevant working experience
every RPL candidate shall be maintained, which should include:
- Learner personal information;
- Mentoring and Assessment information;
- Record(s) of achievement.

### Budget

RPL VET Providers should budget for RPL processes taking into consideration the RPL costing and Gap (top-up) training stated below:

**The cost of RPL**

The cost of RPL for assessment should not be more than N$10,000 per candidate. This amount includes the cost of Portfolios of Evidence and other course materials; physical facilities and overheads; mentoring and assessment of trainees; and administrative costs related to RPL marketing, candidate selection, and the processing, verifying and issuing of assessment results.

**Gap (top-up) training**

The cost of gap training is usually based on credits allocated to a particular unit standard, which in turn relates to notional hours. For example, a unit standard worth 4 credits equates to 40 notional hours of training. If the cost of training (lecture fees, facilities, course materials and administration, etc.) is estimated at N$400 per hour and gap training classes comprise of 15 trainees, the cost of training a candidate on a unit standard worth 4 credits amounts to N$1,067. The cost of training per credit amounts to N$267.

### Documents to be in place

| **Generic RPL Application Form** | For applications by RPL candidates, RPL VET providers must use the approved generic RPL Application Form (Attached as Appendix 1), developed by the NTA, and adapt it for the particular occupations in which they are offering RPL. |
| **Portfolio of Evidence** | To enable RPL candidates to gather evidence against the unit standards of a particular |
qualification, RPL providers should choose from the standardised Portfolios of Evidence developed by the NTA, or use the Generic Portfolio of Evidence, to develop Portfolios of Evidence for those qualifications where no standardised Portfolio of Evidence have been developed.

3. Steps Involved in the Process of RPL Assessment

Once the RPL VET provider has conducted a detailed internal audit of the requirements for implementation (Table 1), they will start to provide information to the public about their RPL services on offer and the requirements for participation.

Whilst there are standard procedures inherent to a RPL process, RPL VET providers shall consider their unique situations, available resources and the kind of potential applicants anticipated. RPL VET providers may be guided by the following steps in implementing RPL at their respective institutions:

Table 2: Stages in the RPL Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities of RPL providers</th>
<th>Role or Function Performed in the RPL Process</th>
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</table>
| **Stage 1: Pre-application Stage** | • Promote and market the availability of RPL services to potential RPL applicants, employers and the industry at large;  
• Provide the needed information and advice to RPL candidates to enable candidates to follow the RPL route. This should include, as a minimum,:  
  - Admission criteria;  
  - Costs to be borne by applicants;  
  - Advisory and facilitation services available;  
  - Career paths available;  
  - Dates of scheduled induction or workshops;  
  - Time frames for each stage of the RPL process; |

Raising public awareness:  
RPL Marketing RPL Services  
Disseminating RPL information

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 2: Receiving of Applications and Supporting Evidence and the Screening of Applicants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selection of Applicants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Receive the application forms and supporting evidence from the prospective applicants;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Constitute a representative selection panel comprising of stakeholders;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The following standard criteria apply:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Level 1: A minimum of 2 years relevant working experience;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Level 2: A minimum of 3 years relevant working experience;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Level 3: A minimum of 5 years relevant working experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The identified prior learning must be directly related to the targeted qualification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- If the prospective applicant’s experience is not related to what s/he applied for, s/he must be guided towards an alternative career path.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage 3: Induction</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Conduct an induction workshop to guide and assist selected participants on:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the RPL process;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the unit standards against which they will be assessed;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- what constitute relevant evidence;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
how to put together a professional portfolio of evidence;
- the assessment approaches and tools that could be used in the RPL assessment;
- Distribute a Portfolio of Evidence to all the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 4: Gathering of Evidence to Substantiate Prior Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RPL facilitation/mentoring</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mentor candidates in collecting relevant evidence against the unit standards of the qualification;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Draw up an assessment schedule containing the venues, dates and duration of assessments, etc.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence required</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Candidates submit their Portfolios of Evidence for assessment which should include the following information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal and contact details of the candidate;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Evidence of competence provided against the Unit Standards of the qualification;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Self-assessment Questionnaire;</td>
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<td>- Recent testimonials and reference letters;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Declaration of Authenticity.</td>
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In collecting evidence, candidates provide a collection of supporting documents which can be *Direct Evidence* and *Indirect Evidence*.

*Direct evidence provides direct proof of knowledge, skills and competence of the candidate and relates specifically to the identified unit standard of the qualification. These may include:*

- Project or work based assignments;
- Evidence of work based assessment - on the job assessment for work skills;
- Personnel records of in-house training and development;
- Accounts of personal experience;
- Employer endorsement and / or testimonials;
- Reference checks;
- Prior qualifications, certificates of education and training;
- Training assessment and test results;
- Curricula/course description/outcomes;
- Staff training records;
- Products of work, sample of documentation/work
undertaken, photographs, etc.

*Indirect evidence supports a portfolio of evidence by linking it to the unit standards, but do not clearly demonstrate competence. In many cases indirect evidence is not sufficient to prove full achievement of the unit standard for the qualification.*

Where the evidence provided in the Portfolio of Evidence does not satisfy the required competency, candidates must be allowed to provide supplementary evidence. Supplementary evidence may include:
- Competency interview;
- Oral or written tests;
- Simulated practical demonstration;
- Workplace practical demonstration.

<table>
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<th>Stage 5: Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment principles</strong></td>
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follow.

Consistent

Assessment is consistent where, given similar evidence and circumstances, an assessor would make the same judgements again; or where assessment by other assessors would lead to the same judgement.

Open

Trainees are given the opportunity to contribute to the assessment planning and collecting of evidence. The assessment process is transparent.

Flexible

Flexible assessment allows for easy entrance into appropriate levels of education and training, and for multiple pathways to the same learning ends, in a manner that facilitates progression. It also uses a variety of assessment approaches, methods and instruments.

Appropriate

The method of assessment is suited to the competencies being assessed as stipulated in the registered unit standard.

Manageable

The assessment must be easy to arrange, cost-effective and practical. It should take into consideration available facilities, equipment and time.

Fair

Assessment must be unbiased and not hinder or advantage a trainee in any way. Assessors must make sure that the chosen approach, methods and instruments support the principle of fairness. They must avoid influences not related to the matters being assessed; for example, arising from differences related to race, gender and assessment method.
Integrated

Assessment should be an integral part of standard setting and curriculum, not something added on afterwards. The teaching and learning elements of each program should be designed in the light of the types of assessment trainees undertake and evidence required, and vice versa, so that trainees can demonstrate what they have learned and provide the evidence required by the unit standard(s). The assessment must be in line with what the trainee has to do at work. (Ideally, the assessment takes place during normal working processes.)

Valid

Validity in assessment refers to an assessment measuring what it is supposed to. If a unit standard requires observation as evidence of performance, then a written examination alone will not be valid.

Assessment procedures, methods, instruments and materials have to match what is being assessed. To be fit for its purpose, assessment must use evidence directly related to the type and level of performance required in a specified standard.

Authentic

The assessor must be satisfied that the work being assessed is the trainee’s own work. In the case of RPL, evidence like certificates and testimonials may have to be referenced for authenticity.

Current

The evidence must reveal what the trainee is currently able to do. The evidence, standards and training material must be up to date with current technology and other industry-specific developments.
Sufficient

‘Sufficient’ means that the assessor must make sure that the evidence collected meets all requirements of the performance criteria of the unit standard. Sufficient evidence also implies that the trainee can repeat the required performance consistently.

Reliable

‘Reliable’ evidence is evidence that will be acceptable by all assessors and which can be repeated in various circumstances. Reliability in assessment is about consistency.

Note:

- Where evidence gaps in the Portfolio of Evidence of a candidate are evident, assessors should, during the competency interview and the practical assessments, determine if the evidence gaps still exist. If they still exist, candidates will be declared not yet competent in these unit standards.
- All the gaps identified should be recorded and detailed in the final assessment report.

Stage 6: Post-Assessment Review

Moderation

The post assessment review process comprises of moderation and external verification.

Assessments conducted are moderated with the aim of enhancing the quality and integrity of assessment in the VET sector.

Registered moderators need to validate that assessments were done consistent with the approved memoranda and based on the best practice principles of assessment.

The moderator should indicate through a form provided in the portfolio of evidence that the assessment outcomes are a clear reflection of the candidates’ competence and either endorse, or adapt the assessment of the assessor. In extreme circumstances, a moderator could request re-assessments or additional assessments.
**External Verification**

External verification is done to ensure that the approved standards for awarding a qualification are met. External verification is also organized to maintain the overall credibility of RPL practices and processes in compliance with NTA and the national RPL policies.

External verifiers determine whether the moderator has correctly evaluated the evidence supplied by the assessor.

Once the verifier has established that the moderation process was adequately conducted, s/he endorses the candidate’s achievement. However, if the verifier identifies irregularities in the moderation and/assessment process, the candidate’s achievement may not be endorsed. Some examples of irregularities are:

- Insufficient or no records of candidate’s achievement are available because the provider did not keep records of candidates’ performance;
- Insufficient evidence of assessment or learning was supplied;
- Assessor incorrectly interpreted the evidence supplied by candidate and judged the candidate to be competent when unit standards or specific outcomes have not been met.

**Stage 7: Certification**

After the moderator and external verification processes have been completed, the candidate is informed of the outcome of the RPL assessment by the NTA.

Candidates will be found Competent (C) if they comply with the competency requirements specified by the NTA for all the unit standards of a particular qualification.

If candidates are found competent in some or none of the unit standards, they will be declared Not Yet Competent (NYC). However, candidates will receive credits for those unit standards in which they were found competent.

**Stage 8: Appeal Procedures**

Candidates should be informed of their right to appeal during their induction or mentoring.

Candidates may appeal if they do not agree with the outcome of their assessments. The appeal should be lodged within 15 days.
after having been notified of the assessment results.

It is recommended that candidates first discuss their concerns with the assessor and if still not satisfied, follow the NTA appeal procedures.\(^4\)

**Stage 9: Gap (Top-up) Training**

Candidates, who want to, should be given an opportunity to receive gap (top-up) training in those unit standards where they were found not yet competent to enable them to achieve a full qualification.

**Stage 10: Re-assessment**

Once candidates have successfully completed the top-up training, they will be re-assessed in the unit standards which they were found not yet competent and certified.

**Record Keeping**

- The NTA will maintain a national database of learner records.
- VET providers should keep record of all assessment information in line with the NTA procedures.
- Portfolios of Evidence and other relevant assessment documents should be kept in a safe place.
- These documents should be made available to NTA on request.
- Records and marks should be handled in accordance to the NTA policies and procedures.

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\(^4\) Included in the National Assessment Policy of the NTA
4. Roles and Responsibilities of Key Role Players in implementing RPL

4.1 The NTA

One of the main roles of the NTA regarding the provision of RPL is to create the legal framework and an enabling environment within which RPL can be conducted. The NTA is, inter alia, obligated to:

4.1.1 Register RPL VET providers, assessors and moderators, verifiers and assessment centres;

4.1.2 Provide support and guidance to RPL providers on RPL implementation;

4.1.3 Monitor and audit RPL providers;

4.1.4 Develop polices and guidelines for implementing RPL within the VET sector;

4.1.5 Oversee the national implementation of RPL within VET and manage the policy;

4.1.6 Research RPL implementation strategies and modes of delivery and share findings and recommendations with RPL VET providers;

4.1.7 Report to the Ministry of Education on RPL achievements and challenges;

4.1.8 Maintain a central database of learner records in line with the NTA procedures.

There are a number of other important stakeholders in relation to RPL who play a pivotal role in RPL provision. The National Policy on RPL sets these out in considerable detail. In terms of VET, the following simplified version is advanced below:
4.2 Employers

Employers create an environment that is conducive to RPL by:

4.2.1 Developing guidelines for implementing RPL.

4.2.2 Aligning HR policies to take account of RPL, e.g. workforce planning, job matching, promotion possibilities.

4.2.3 Ensuring that on-the-job training and HR development activities are aligned to standards registered on the NQF.

4.2.4 Developing ‘preferred supplier’ relationships with accredited providers (private and public sector) for in-house training and HR development interventions.

4.3 RPL VET Providers

Provide RPL services that comply with statutory requirements:

4.3.1 Registered and or accredited VET providers can apply for an expansion of scope to offer RPL training and assessment.

4.3.2 Implement RPL policies, processes and procedures for RPL.

4.3.3 Ensure that sufficient resources are available for RPL implementation.

4.3.4 Comply with quality audits undertaken by accreditation bodies.

4.3.5 Establish reporting mechanisms.

4.4 RPL Applicants

Participate in the RPL process and provide appropriate evidence to prove competence(s) and

4.4.1 Apply for RPL.

4.4.2 Identify prior learning in relation to unit standards and related criteria.

4.4.3 Prepare evidence pertaining to that learning.

4.4.4 Undertake continued development where identified.

4.4.5 Provide feedback as required on the RPL process.
4.5 RPL Mentors

RPL mentors advise RPL candidates in the selection of qualifications and their preparation for assessment. They support RPL applicants by:

4.5.1 Receiving training and continuing professional development in RPL in VET and mentoring.

4.5.2 Providing motivational and learning support to RPL applicants.

4.5.3 Advising applicants the possibilities of RPL, different pathways to qualifications and career guidance.

4.5.4 Ensuring applicants understand the RPL VET policy, process and procedures.

4.5.5 Supporting applicants to identify their prior learning and interpret registered qualifications, unit standards and assessment criteria by linking them to learning, including using group mentoring to facilitate shared learning between applicants.

4.5.6 Assisting in the identification and compilation of authentic, current and valid evidence of competence.

4.5.7 Helping the applicant to prepare for assessment.

4.5.8 Providing feedback as required on the RPL process.

4.6 RPL Assessors

RPL Assessors have the responsibility to assess RPL candidates and determine whether or not they have met the unit standard requirements of the qualification. They:

4.6.1 Receive training and continuing professional development opportunities in assessment and RPL.

4.6.2 Inform applicants about the assessment arrangements.

4.6.3 Implement fit-for-purpose assessment methods, approved by the NTA, including integrated assessment tasks covering more than one unit standard.

4.6.4 Convene RPL assessment panels (if appropriate).

4.6.5 Coordinate and conduct RPL assessments according to relevant policies and principles i.e. assess applicants’ collections of evidence against required standards and criteria.
4.6.6 Communicate results to applicants i.e. inform applicants that recommendations have been made to the NTA/awarding body; give feedback and guidance on how to address areas for development.

4.6.7 Regularly review the assessment process and implement changes as and when required.

4.6.8 Comply with all moderation and quality assurance requirements of the NTA.

4.6.9 Provide records of assessment to the assessment centre for safe keeping for a period up to six months.

4.6.10 Ensure that all original documents or materials are kept and remain NTA property.

4.6.11 Keep abreast of current assessment practices, learning outcomes, standards for assessment, methods of assessment, timeframes, technical details and understanding of the process.

4.6.12 Provide feedback as required on the RPL process.

5. Costing RPL

To ensure that RPL is widely accessible, fees for the delivery and administration of RPL services must not be so high that they become barriers to prospective candidates.

The National RPL Policy (2014) states that “RPL services and assessment shall not cost more than full-time and face to face programmes, particularly if RPL services are integrated into an existing training institution infrastructure”.

The cost of RPL for assessment should not be more than N$10 000 per candidate. This amount includes the cost of Portfolios of Evidence and other course materials; physical facilities and overheads; mentoring and assessment of trainees; and administrative costs related to RPL marketing, candidate selection, and the processing, verifying and issuing of assessment results.

Gap (top-up) training

The cost of gap training is usually based on credits allocated to a particular unit standard, which in turn relates to notional hours. For example, a unit standard worth 4 credits equates to 40 notional hours of training. If the cost of training (lecture fees, facilities, course materials and administration, etc.) is estimated at N$400 per hour and gap training classes comprise of 15 trainees, the cost of training a candidate on a unit standard worth 4 credits amounts to N$1,067. The cost of training per credit amounts to N$267.
6. Quality Assurance

The Regulations for the Registration of Training Providers and the quality assurance mechanisms to be developed by the Assessment and Certification Division for Assessment and Certification in VET will also apply to Training Providers of RPL services.

Enquiries

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