# POLICY FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) WITHIN THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (VET) SYSTEM

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<td>Chief Operations Officer</td>
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBUS       Competence Based Unit Standard  
COSDEC     Community Skills Development Centre  
ETD        Education, Training and Development  
NQA        Namibia Qualifications Authority  
NQF        National Qualifications Framework  
NTA        Namibia Training Authority  
RPL        Recognition of Prior Learning  
SADC       Southern African Development Community  
VET        Vocational Education and Training  
VTC        Vocational Training Centre  
OECD       Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
DEFINITIONS:

Learning outcomes and unit standards are statements of what a learner is expected to know and/or do irrespective of the context of learning. They guide assessment in training and in an RPL process.

Formal learning is organised in terms of scheduling, learning outcomes, financing, assessment, certification and structure. Formal learning is intentional. It is exemplified by school, university or training organised at the workplace.

Informal learning is at the opposite end of the learning continuum to formal learning. It is not organised according to a structured programme or a curriculum. Derived from everyday activities in the workplace, at home or in the community, it usually occurs without the individual’s awareness or intention. It is sometimes called ‘experiential learning’ or simply ‘experience’. Informal learning links to learning outcomes because the latter are the vehicles through which informal learning can be made visible.

Non-formal learning lacks at least one of the four elements mentioned in relation to formal learning. It can be located anywhere on the spectrum between formal and informal learning, and usually refers to short courses of education and training that are intentional, but not fully formalised.

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 (perhaps more accurately) as RLO – the Recognition of Learning Outcomes.

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 specific learning programme 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.

A RPL VET Provider is an entity registered with the NTA that offers RPL services in the VET sector leading to an NQF registered 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.
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Revision status: 0
Document Number: NTA-ACD-01-001

Effective Date:
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1. **Purpose**

The purpose of the RPL VET policy is to provide a framework for the assessment and recognition of various types of prior learning acquired outside the formal education and training system in Namibia.

2. **Objectives**

The National Policy on RPL articulates the Government’s commitment to recognise and develop the skills of all Namibians to address mismatches in labour market supply and demand. This is part of the national strategy via the NQF to improve the value and reputation of all qualifications. It suggests a prima facie case for RPL and for the VET system to be at the centre of the RPL endeavour for the following employability-related reasons:

2.1 Well-conceptualised and carefully implemented RPL represents a way of auditing and addressing the skills shortages that exist at all levels of the Namibian labour market and that currently stifle development, growth and employment creation.

2.2 As a way of benchmarking and awarding qualifications to suitably experienced and skilled candidates who are currently underemployed or unemployed, including formalising skills that have been developed in the informal economy and being open to people who lack literacy skills.

2.3 Benefiting the large number of people who have gained skills and knowledge from course attendance, but currently have no way to benefit from their investment in training because of a lack of certification.

2.4 By valuing existing competencies and increasing access to further skills development, the RPL VET Policy seeks to ensure that RPL contributes to:

2.4.1 Redress and better livelihoods for those who have been historically disadvantaged;

2.4.2 The creation of a cadre of vibrant, entrepreneurial and well-educated citizens to take the country forward;

2.4.3 Improved equity through new routes to qualifications.

3. **Legislative Base**

The policy complies with the following legislation, policies and regulations:

3.1 Vocational Education and Training Act, 2008 (Act No1 of 2008);

3.2 Namibia Qualifications Authority Act, 1996 (Act No 29 of 1996);

3.3 Regulations Setting- up the National qualifications Framework for Namibia: Namibia Qualifications Authority Act, 1996 ;

4. Principles

RPL practices are based on broad and operating principles.

4.1 Broad Principles for RPL in VET

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

4.1.1 Be inclusive, equitable and sensitive to the social context of applicants. It should also take into consideration factors such as informal learning backgrounds, historical disadvantages and barriers.

4.1.2 Be learner-centred and developmental adopting a non-deficit approach to competence. Applicants must be credited for what they know and can do. Although assessment is central, RPL is also a learning process.

4.1.3 Be complementary rather than compete with education and training. The two sub-systems (VET and RPL) are co-dependent and need to be addressed simultaneously, e.g. through the development of new qualifications relevant to the labour-market. As stated in the National Policy, RPL is, ‘an important partner for the growing provision of quality education and training for all’.

4.1.4 Protect the integrity of curriculum-based standards, qualifications and training institutions.

4.1.5 Be oriented to qualifications that have currency and value in society, especially for employers.

4.1.6 Enshrine consultation with relevant stakeholders to ensure that practices develop in line with labour market needs.

4.1.7 Encourage the development of the VET system, whilst evaluating its own impact on society and the economy and its articulation with other parts of the education system and industry.

4.1.8 Encourage the registration of all qualifications capable of award via RPL on the NQF. The NQF is the grid through which qualifications articulate and credit transfer – nationally and internationally.

4.1.9 Be set at the same standard as formal VET provision. This means that some candidates will be found not yet competent, but they need to be directed to training or additional work experience.

4.1.10 Promote qualifications and credits for unit standards issued on the basis of training and the RPL system to have the same currency and value.

4.2 Operating Principles for RPL in VET

The optimal functioning of a labour market requires competent individuals. VET qualifications, registered on the NQF, signal that the holder has demonstrated competence in specific occupational activities. Qualifications comprise competence-based unit standards that can be transversal and vocational or generic. These standards are linked to credits – the
transferability of which is determined by arrangements between the NTA and providers within and outside Namibia. Standards also inform and contribute to curriculum standards and learning programmes.

In the context of the NQF, RPL can be applied to:

4.2.1 Obtain full VET qualifications that have currency in society as a whole and the labour market in particular.

4.2.2 Obtain partial qualifications in the form of unit standards, which can be augmented to full qualifications in an agreed time period.

4.2.3 Gain access to a learning programme (as an alternative to entry requirements based solely on educational attainment in the formal system)

4.2.4 Gain exemption from part of a training programme (sometimes referred to as ‘advanced standing’).

5. Policy Statements

5.1 Section (5) (3) of the VET Act, 2008 defines the powers and functions of the National Training Authority (NTA) as including, inter alia, ‘conducting assessment, including Recognition of Prior Learning’. This power is exercised in collaboration with the Namibian Qualifications Authority (NQA), which, through its Act, has overall responsibility for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

5.2 The RPL VET Policy is applicable to all service providers practicing RPL in the VET sector: the NTA (as custodian of the VET sector and lead body in terms of RPL), Vocational Training Centres (VTCs), Community Skills Development Centres (COSDECs), employers, employer organisations, professional bodies, industry bodies, trade unions, private RPL VET providers, assessment centres and RPL candidates.

5.3 The NTA will specify the minimum admission requirements for RPL candidates in the Guidelines for implementing RPL.

5.4 Qualifications and competence-based unit standards form the nexus of VET and RPL. They embody the skills, knowledge and attributes to be assessed for VET trainees or RPL applicants to obtain a qualification or part of a qualification. Prior learning can only be recognised if the assessment is based on NQF registered unit standards and qualifications.

5.5 RPL need to have a clear workplace focus, whilst also encouraging further learning. This means that employers and RPL VET providers need to work together to ensure that the flexible options for further learning (including distance and e-learning options) are available and encouraged.

5.6 All RPL VET providers (vocational training centres, private training providers and companies) need to be NTA-registered and/or NQA-accredited.

5.7 Assessors and moderators conducting RPL assessments should be registered with the NTA.
5.8 RPL VET providers conducting assessments must ensure that they abide by the following assessment principles as per the National Policy on RPL and explained in the Guidelines for implementing RPL: consistency; transparency; flexibility; appropriateness; manageability; fairness; integrated; validity; authenticity; currency; sufficiency; and reliability.

5.9 All RPL VET providers shall be provided with the Guidelines for implementing RPL, procedures and documentation to manage RPL in accordance with national imperatives e.g. applications, selection, mentoring, fees, assessment strategies and methods, recording results, appeals and quality assurance.

5.10 To ensure that RPL is widely accessible, fees for the delivery and administration of RPL services should not be so high that they become barriers to candidates. The NTA approved fees to be charged for RPL services are outlined in the Guidelines for implementing RPL.

5.11 To ensure overall credibility and consistency of the processes of RPL, RPL VET providers should comply with the quality assurance and certification requirements as set out in NTA policies and regulations.

5.12 Language shall not be an inhibiting factor when conducting RPL within the VET system. Candidates shall - as far as possible - be assessed in a Namibian language in which they are proficient. However, where certain levels of English proficiency are required in a unit standard within a qualification, candidates must comply with the requirements of the unit standard.

6. Responsibility

The Assessment and Certification Division of the NTA is responsible for the adherence to and implementation of this policy.

7. Review

The NTA is responsible to evaluate this Policy against changing needs, innovative development and effectiveness. This Policy will be revised every three (3) years or as soon as any of the information within the Policy becomes invalid or amendable.