



## DEVELOPING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (ACQF)



### TRAINING MODULE FOUR

# 04

## VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION OF LEARNING



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP  
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE



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Comments and additional information to be sent to: [ecb@etf.europa.eu](mailto:ecb@etf.europa.eu).

The authors of this report are: Mirriam Chiyaba, Modest Hamalabbi, Fidelis Cheelo and James Mwewa.

Reviewers and contributors: Eduarda Castel-Branco and Jeffy Mukora.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACQF	African Continental Qualifications Framework
ASG-QA	African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
AU	African Union
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CATS	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
EU	European Union
HAQAA	Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PAQAF	Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework
QA	quality assurance
REC	Regional Economic Community
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF	Regional Qualifications Framework
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## ABSTRACT

The validation and recognition of learning remain useful tools in the process of establishing the comparability of foreign qualifications and formally acknowledging the validity of learning. Validation and recognition of learning refers to procedures by which competent recognition authorities recognise qualifications, credits and prior learning in accordance with norms and standards recognised nationally or internationally. Validation and recognition of learning encompasses the formal acknowledgment by a competent recognition authority of the validity of an education qualification, of credits, of partial studies, or of prior learning. The benefits that the processes of validation and recognition of learning bring at national, regional and continental levels cannot be overemphasised. The benefits include surety to stakeholders that an individual holds a genuine qualification, affirmation that an individual has undergone training and possesses the appropriate competencies expected from the learning programme, contribution to social inclusion, equity and enhance the right to access education, training and employment as well as contribution to the quality of education, institutions and qualifications. Despite the desirable benefits that can be realised from the validation and recognition of learning, the process is not without challenges. Notable among these challenges include diversity of education systems, diversity of validation and recognition procedures, scarcity of information in some jurisdictions, language barriers and pandemics such as the Covid-19.

Generally, three (3) modes are used to validate and recognise learning globally, namely; recognition of qualifications, credit accumulation and transfer systems and recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience. In most countries in Africa, recognition of qualifications involves establishing the legal status of the awarding body, ascertaining the authenticity of the qualification and assessing the comparability of the qualification. It can be observed from both the international and country perspectives elaborated in Chapter 3 that RPL/VAE encompasses all forms of learning regardless of how the learning was achieved, be it in a formal, non-formal or informal setting. It should be noted that in validating and recognising learning acquired in a formal setting, the credit accumulation and transfer system is utilised. Countries in Africa are encouraged to put in place policies, guidelines and systems to facilitate the validation and recognition of all forms of learning.

The processes of validation and recognition of learning are premised on reliable information on NQFs, NQs, qualifications, quality assurance systems and education systems. Therefore, Member States should put in place mechanisms to ensure the availability and timely provision of such information whenever required by other Member States.

## EXPECTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of the training programme, learners should be able to:

- 1) Outline the benefits of validation and recognition of learning at national, regional and continental levels;
- 2) Explain the factors affecting validation and recognition of learning;
- 3) Explain the concept of recognition of qualifications;
- 4) Explain the concept of credit accumulation and transfer;
- 5) Explain the concept of recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience;
- 6) Carry out the recognition of qualifications;
- 7) Apply policies, guidelines and systems on credit accumulation and transfer; and
- 8) Implement policies and guidelines on the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAINING MODULE

## 1.1 Purpose of this Training Module

This Training Module is one of the ten ACQF Training Modules. It supports the dissemination and application of the ACQF Guideline 4 on Validation and Recognition of Learning. The Training Module focuses on the validation and recognition of learning through recognition of prior learning (RPL)/ validation of acquired experience (VAE), credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) and the recognition of qualifications.

The Training Module aims at providing learners with the knowledge, skills and competences for fair and transparent validation and recognition of learning, thereby facilitating mobility of persons from one country to another to study, research, teach or work. It highlights the common principles, steps, tools and sources for further reference to help countries and regions in developing, consolidating, reviewing and implementing systems related to the validation and recognition of learning.

This Training Module has been developed based on the ACQF Technical Guideline 4 on the Validation and Recognition of Learning.

## 1.2 Training Module structure

This Training Module:

- a) Is based on the content elaborated in the Technical Guideline, and expand it, exploring the literature, recent research and experiences;
- b) Raises questions and issues in debate that could not be expressed in the Technical Guideline;
- c) Provides examples and cases illustrating the main concepts, issues and application of the approaches and methods; and
- d) Provides examples and cases taken from relevant practices and developments worldwide, with a focus on frameworks and systems with substantial and relevant experience for the different themes.

The Training Module includes:

- a) Reflective questions that could be addressed as an individual or as a group (e.g. workshop group, work group);
- b) Learning activities that could be addressed as an individual or as a group (e.g. class/lecture group, work group);
- c) Access to case studies or examples, readings, disparate views (if relevant) and
- d) Assessment tasks.

This training module covers the following topics:

- 1) Key concepts and definitions;
- 2) Recognition of qualifications;
- 3) Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS); and
- 4) Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)/ validation of acquired experience (VAE).

As one of the ACQF instruments, this training module complements other ACQF training modules.



### 1.3 Utilisation of the Training Module

The Training Module is designed for:

- Self-paced learning (individual);
- Teacher / trainer / facilitator directed learning – which may include group learning; and
- A combination of the above.

The Training Module is freely accessible in several formats for flexible adaptation to different contexts and to learners' needs and possibilities: as PDF files to download from ACQF Website and disseminate; as digital content accessible via ACQF digital Learning Management System, accessible online or offline, including via an App for Mobile phones. Interested users (learners, teachers / trainers and organisations) may use the full set of Modules, or focus on just a few.

### 1.4 Target users

This Training Module will be used as a training tool on validation and recognition of learning by various stakeholders within the continent of Africa and beyond, such as:

- a) Ministries and departments dealing with qualifications frameworks development and coordination, especially in early stages of the development process, or when operationalisation starts and more staff, stakeholders and technical resource persons are involved;
- b) Quality councils, quality assurance agencies - for their staff, members and technical resource persons;
- c) Technical projects designing or reviewing national qualifications frameworks with national taskforces and working groups;
- d) Education and training providers, e.g., as optional or regular training modules on the themes and issues related with qualifications frameworks and systems: teacher training institutes, higher education institutions (departments of education), training centres for staff of public sector institutions, training centres of employers' associations and professional bodies and sector skills councils involved in development of qualifications; and
- e) International organisations' training centres and capacity development activities.

## CHAPTER 2: KEY CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

### Learning objectives:

At the end of this chapter, the learner should be able to:

- a) Explain the concept of validation and recognition of learning;
- b) Explain the purpose of validation and recognition of learning;
- c) Outline the benefits of validation and recognition of learning at national, regional and continental levels; and
- d) Explain the factors affecting validation and recognition of learning.

### 2.1 Introduction

Validation and recognition of learning refers to procedures by which competent recognition authorities recognise qualifications, credits and prior learning in accordance with norms and standards recognised nationally or internationally. Validation and recognition of learning encompasses the formal acknowledgment by a competent recognition authority of the validity of an education qualification, of credits, of partial studies, or of prior learning.

### 2.2 Purpose of validation and recognition of learning

The purpose of validation and recognition of learning is to establish the comparability of foreign qualifications and formally acknowledge the validity of learning with a view to providing an applicant with outcomes including, but not limited to:

- a) the right to apply for further education; and/or
- b) the possibility to seek employment opportunities.

The recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience, credit accumulation and transfer and recognition of qualifications play a critical role in facilitating mobility and progression within and across national qualifications frameworks and systems.

### 2.3 Benefits of validation and recognition of learning at national, regional and continental levels

The processes of validation and recognition of learning bring with them a number of benefits at national, regional and continental levels, as outlined below:

- a) Surety to stakeholders that an individual holds a genuine qualification;
- b) Affirmation that an individual has undergone training and possesses the appropriate competencies expected from the learning programme;
- c) Confirmation that, in the case of RPL/ VAE, an individual possesses the appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies acquired in informal and non-formal contexts, and leading to award of a part or full qualification following a quality-assured process of identification, documentation, assessment and certification;

- d) Indication of the level at which a qualification is recognised on the NQF/ RQF;
- e) Contribute to social inclusion, equity and enhance the right to access education, training and employment;
- f) Facilitates mobility of individuals for purposes of further studies or work;
- g) Promote international understanding of education systems;
- h) Contribute to the quality of education, institutions and qualifications; and
- i) Identification of diploma and accreditation mills.

## 2.4 Factors affecting validation and recognition of learning

There are various factors that influence the validation and recognition of learning in Africa and beyond. Notable among them are the following:

- a) Diversity of education systems;
- b) Diversity of validation and recognition procedures;
- c) Scarcity of information in some jurisdictions;
- d) Language barriers; and
- e) Pandemics such as the Covid-19.

### 2.4.1 Diversity of education systems

It is important to note that there exists a variety of education systems within the African continent, and the complexity and variety of institutions, programmes and qualifications within them. In as much as increased international cooperation and globalisation have attempted to bring about homogeneity among systems and a certain level of harmonisation, they have also led to a proliferation of new institutions as well as new programmes and qualifications.

Further, new developments in quality assurance, credit accumulation and transfer, and methods of delivering education have also emerged. Thus, differences at the system level, or at institutional or programme levels have made validation and recognition of learning difficult.

The following are examples of education systems obtaining in selected countries on the African continent:

#### a) Morocco:

The education system in Morocco comprises pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Morocco's education system consists of 6 years of primary, 3 years of lower-middle / intermediate school, 3 years of upper secondary, and tertiary education.

#### b) South Africa:

According to the official grouping by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), there are two bands. These are General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET). GET includes grade 0 and grades 1 to 9 while FET includes grades 10 to 12 and other vocational training facilities that are not considered higher learning. More so, under the General Education and Training (GET) band, there is a Foundation Phase, which includes grade 0 (kindergarten) and grades 1 to 3, an Intermediate Phase, which includes grade 4 to grade 6. Then, there is the Senior Phase, which includes grade 7 to grade 9. But in terms of administration, the schools are referred to as primary schools, comprising of grade R with grades 1 to 7, and secondary schools: grades 8 to 12. The secondary schools are sometimes called high schools or colleges. After high school/ college, a student who wishes to further his or her schooling in South Africa can also apply to the higher school or university based on his or her choice of the course to study. And once

that is completed, a student gets the National Senior Certificate containing the matriculation endorsements. These endorsements form the minimum requirement that qualifies a student for admission into any university in the country.

**c) Uganda:**

Uganda has an academic qualifications framework that entails seven (7) years of primary school, four (4) years of lower secondary, two (2) years of advanced secondary school and three (3) years of university education.

**d) Ghana:**

Ghana operates on a 6-3-4-4 System comprising the following levels:

- Primary School – 6 years
- Junior Secondary/High School – 3 years
- Senior Secondary School – 3 years (Senior High School entrants 2007- 2009 – 4 years)
- University Bachelor's Degree – 4 years.

**e) Democratic Republic of the Congo:**

The education system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is structured as follows:

- Ecole Maternelle (Kindergarten) – 2 years
- Ecole Primaire (Primary School) – 6 years
- Ecole Secondaire (Secondary School) – 6 years
- Tertiary – 3 to 7 years, with Licence (Licentiate), which is the equivalence of a bachelor's degree taking between 2 to 3 years.

**f) Zambia:**

As part of her education system, Zambia operates a 7-2-3 schooling system comprising 7 years of primary education, 2 years of basic/ junior secondary education and 3 years of senior secondary education. The education system also includes a technical education and vocational training sub sector with qualification durations ranging between 1 to 3 years. Lastly, the system has a higher education sub sector with durations for bachelor's degrees ranging between 4 to 7 years.

Note: the country is rolling out early childhood education which generally runs for 2 years from ages 3 to 5 years prior to primary education.

## 2.4.2 Diversity of validation and recognition procedures

Validation and recognition culture and procedures differ between regions, countries and institutions and may involve a wide range of competent authorities.

The following are examples of competent authorities involved in validation and recognition of learning in selected countries in Africa:

**a) Zimbabwe:**

- Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development
- Zimbabwe Council of Higher Education (ZIMCHE)
- Higher Education Examinations Council (HEXCO)
- Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC).

**b) Malawi:**

- Ministry of Education Science and Technology
- National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)
- Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA)
- Malawi National Examinations Board (MANEB).

**c) Tanzania:**

- Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU)
- National Council for Technical Education (NACTE)
- National Examinations Council of Tanzania (NECTA)

**d) Cape Verde:**

- Higher Education Regulatory Agency (ARES)
- Coordination Unit of the National Qualifications System (UCSNQ).

**e) Senegal:**

- National Commission for the Recognition and Accreditation of Diplomas, Grades, Titles and Certificates (CNRHDGTC)
- The Directorate of Pedagogical Affairs (DAP)
- Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation for university degrees
- Ministry of National Education for A-Levels certificates and others
- Ministry of Employment Vocational Training and Crafts coordinating the NVQF.

**f) The Gambia:**

- National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority (NAQAA)
- Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST).

**g) Egypt:**

- National Authority for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (NAQAAE)
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Industry
- Ministry of Manpower.

The diversity in procedures may arise from the differences in documentation required from the applicant for purposes of validation and recognition. Further, legal requirements such as access to information regulations also present limitations in the validation and recognition processes.

### 2.4.3 Scarcity of information in some jurisdictions

African States are at various levels of development and implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks. While some countries have developed and fully implemented NQFs in their jurisdictions, others are either in the process or are yet to commence the development. The differences in the level of development and implementation of NQFs has contributed to scarcity of vital information necessary for comparability of qualifications. As at end of 2021, the countries that did not have NQFs or were in the process of developing NQFs included Morocco, Cameroon, Malawi, Mozambique, Eswatini and Angola. In

addition to the foregoing, access to reliable information on education systems, and validation and recognition procedures in some jurisdictions continues to pose a challenge in the validation and recognition of learning in Africa. For example, there was a notable scarcity of vital information necessary for comparability of qualifications emanating from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is because the education system archives are in a very poor state; their management is handled by various government ministries and institutions responsible for education, rather than being centralised in one national record<sup>1</sup>.

#### 2.4.4 Language barriers

Understanding the content of credentials presented for purposes of validating and recognising learning is key in arriving at a fair, transparent and timely outcome. However, arising from the differences in languages existing in various African countries, competent recognition authorities tend to face limitations in the validation and recognition processes due to lack of appreciation of foreign languages beyond their national working languages. This has usually resulted in delays in providing feedback to applicants.

#### 2.4.5 Pandemics such as the Covid-19

The processes of validation and recognition of learning are time bound. Hence, the timely provision and receipt of confirmations from awarding bodies and competent recognition authorities become key in these processes. However, pandemics such as the Covid-19 have resulted in delays in receipt of confirmations and subsequent processing of applications mainly due to closures or constrained operations of awarding bodies and competent recognition authorities.

### 2.5 Conclusion

The validation and recognition of learning remain useful tools in the process of establishing the comparability of foreign qualifications and formally acknowledging the validity of learning. The benefits that the processes of validation and recognition of learning bring at national, regional and continental levels cannot be overemphasised. The benefits include surety to stakeholders that an individual holds a genuine qualification, affirmation that an individual has undergone training and possesses the appropriate competencies expected from the learning programme, contribution to social inclusion, equity and enhance the right to access education, training and employment as well as contribution to the quality of education, institutions and qualifications. Despite the desirable benefits that can be realised from the validation and recognition of learning, the process is not without challenges. Notable among these challenges include diversity of education systems, diversity of validation and recognition procedures, scarcity of information in some jurisdictions, language barriers and pandemics such as the Covid-19.

### 2.6 Reflective questions

- 1) What do you understand by the terms validation and recognition of learning?
- 2) What is the purpose of carrying out validation and recognition of learning?
- 3) What are the benefits of validation and recognition of learning at national, regional and continental levels?
- 4) Briefly explain the factors affecting validation and recognition of learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Global inventory of regional and national qualifications frameworks 2019 Volume II: National and regional cases

- 5) Other than those stated in sub section 2.4.2, list three (3) countries in Africa that do not have dedicated institutions (National Qualifications Authorities) responsible for validation and recognition of learning.

## CHAPTER 3: VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION OF LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF NQFS AND ACQF

### Learning objectives:

At the end of this chapter the learner should be able to:

- a) Identify the various modes of validation and recognition of learning;
- b) Explain the role of the competent recognition authorities and education institutions in the recognition of qualifications;
- c) Carryout the recognition of qualifications;
- d) Define key terms associated with credit accumulation and transfer;
- e) Implement policies and systems on credit accumulation and transfer;
- f) Define the types of learning to be considered for RPL/VAE; and
- g) Carryout the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience.

### 3.1 Modes of validation and recognition of learning

The validation and recognition of learning can be undertaken using different modes listed below.

- a) Recognition of qualifications;
- b) Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems; and
- c) Recognition of Prior Learning/ Validation of Acquired Experience.

### 3.2 Recognition of qualifications

Recognition of qualifications is a formal acknowledgement by a competent recognition authority regarding the validity and academic level of a foreign education qualification, partial studies or prior learning/ acquired experience. Recognition of qualifications aims to provide an applicant with outcomes, including, but not limited to, the right to apply for admission to higher education or training and the possibility to seek employment opportunities.

There are various stakeholders who play critical roles in the recognition of qualifications. Some of these stakeholders have specified roles as indicated below.

#### 3.2.1 Role of the competent recognition authorities

Competent recognition authorities are responsible for making decisions on the recognition of qualifications. With this role, competent recognition authorities facilitate mobility and inclusion in the academic world or labour market. They also protect national education and labour markets from fake and substandard qualifications through standardisation and authenticating of qualifications. In addition, competent recognition authorities are responsible for establishing and maintaining national databases of learning achievements in their respective countries.

In some jurisdictions such as Malawi, Botswana and Nigeria, competent recognition authorities combine the roles of recognition of qualifications with that of providing quality assurance in the education and training sector.

In some countries, ministries of education also play a role in the assessment and recognition of qualifications, either directly or by delegating authority to another entity, such as the National Information Centre or a similar entity.

Countries where ministries responsible for education play a role in the assessment and recognition of qualifications in Africa include Zimbabwe, Malawi, Egypt, Senegal and the Gambia.

### 3.2.2 Role of the education institutions

Education institutions play an important role in the authentication of qualifications. They confirm the awarding of qualifications and provide records of learner achievements for input into national databases. The records provide for quick retrieval and thus timely confirmation of award.

### 3.2.3 Example of the process for recognition of qualifications

The process for recognition of qualifications involves a number of stages aimed at establishing the authenticity and comparability of qualifications. The following approach is based on common features of policies and practices used in the recognition process:

#### **i) Establishing the legal status of the awarding body**

In some jurisdictions, awarding bodies draw their mandate to award qualifications from statutes establishing them, while in others, the authority is conferred upon the awarding bodies through charters, decrees or accreditation by quality assurance bodies. Whichever the case, awarding bodies must have the legal mandate to award qualifications.

Generally, the reliable sources of information on the legal status of awarding bodies include:

- a) Ministries responsible for education and training;
- b) Accreditation and quality assurance bodies;
- c) National Information Centres; and
- d) Websites hosting statutes or charters establishing the awarding bodies.

#### **ii) Establishing the authenticity of the qualification**

At this stage, confirmation is sought from the awarding body to affirm the awarding of the qualification. However, the confirmation can also be obtained through private third party credential evaluators or foreign missions. During this process, it is also essential to establish whether or not the qualification holder was enrolled by the awarding body and whether the duration and other requirements for award of the qualification were met.

In order for the authentication process to be undertaken, it is generally acceptable practice that the applicant provides the following documentation to accompany the application to the competent recognition authority:

- a) Copy of the qualification.
- b) Complete transcript of results.



- c) Sworn/ certified translations of qualification and transcript of results. These are only required when the original documents are not in the authenticating country's working language.
- d) Proof of identity. In some jurisdictions, an affidavit/ marriage certificate may be required in cases where there are differences in names on qualification document and proof of identity.
- e) Signed consent. This is a common requirement in most countries due to data and information protection legal requirements.

### iii) Assessing the comparability of qualification

Assessment of the comparability of qualifications, also known as evaluation of qualifications, is carried out by making a comparison of the national level descriptors or specific programme learning outcomes from the source country to the national level descriptors of the receiving country.

In addition to the process described above, comparison of the duration and entry requirements for a qualification from the source country against that from the receiving country should be undertaken.

Upon carrying out the aforementioned processes, an appropriate qualification level and type is then assigned to the foreign qualification in the receiving country based on the degree or extent of comparability.

**Note:** where a competent recognition authority decides not to recognise a qualification from within or from another country, a justification should be provided, and where possible suggest remedial measures to ensure recognition in the future.

## 3.3 Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS)

**Credit Accumulation and Transfer System** is one of the modes for validating and recognising learning through the recognition of credits. CATS is a form of RPL used to recognise and validate formal learning. It is a systematic way of describing an educational programme by attaching credits to its components. Using the accumulated credits, the system allows mobility of learners from one programme to another within or across institutions without having to duplicate learning thereby facilitating lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

A **credit** is the 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 accumulation** is the process of acquiring credits for learning towards a qualification. It is premised on recognition and validation of units of learning. Upon accumulation, credits can then be transferred.

**Credit transfer** is the process of allowing individuals who have accumulated credit in one context to have it valued and recognised in another context.

**Credit rating** is the process of determining a numerical value of a programme, course or module. It involves an evaluation of intended learning outcomes, minimum body of knowledge and the assessment of the programme, course or module. Credits provide a basis for determining comparability of learning among programmes.

In this guideline, the computation of credits for purposes of validating and recognising learning shall comprise all the learning activities of the student, inclusive of contact time, private study, research, assignment writing and assessment. As such, education and training institutions should work out the number of credits that should be allocated to all learning activities.

Depending on the national or institutional requirements or preferences, terms or semester systems may be used to accumulate course/module credit. Institutions that use terms have a system where students complete three sets of classes, as part of the academic year. While institutions that use semester units divide classes into two sets of classes, for the academic year. Regardless of the system used, study hours can be translated into the number of credits.

### 3.3.1 Translation of study/ work hours into credits

In order to assign appropriate credits to learning, the following systems may be adopted:

**a) System 1:**

Under this system, it is considered that an average student puts in a minimum of 1200 hours of work per year. Further, 10 study hours are equated to 1 credit. Consequently, a one-year programme or academic year has 1200 notional study hours which translates into 120 credits.

In arriving at the 1200 notional study hours, it is considered that an average student accumulates 8 hours per day, which amounts to 40 hours per week. Generally, an academic year has 30 weeks, translating into the 1200 hours.

Examples of countries in Africa that use this system include Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa, Zambia and Botswana.

**b) System 2:**

Under this system, it is considered that the student workload of a full-time study programme amounts to around 1500-1800 hours per year and in those cases one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours. The system is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year.

Examples of countries in Africa that use this system include Algeria, Uganda and Tunisia.

In order to convert credits from System 2 to System 1, 1 credit from System 2 should be equated to 2 credits in System 1.

### 3.3.2 Application of CATS in the context of the ACQF

The ACQF is designed to be a referencing qualifications framework for the African continent, to enhance transparency, comparability and quality of qualifications and mutual trust between national qualifications frameworks and systems, thereby promoting mobility of people for purposes of further studies and work. These objectives are reached by means of referencing of national qualifications frameworks or systems to ACQF, and other added-value activities.

As a core function of the ACQF, referencing is based on a set of agreed criteria and procedures that assure consistency and credibility of the process and its results. Through Criterion 2 proposed for ACQF referencing (Table 1) countries demonstrate the extent of application of the learning outcomes approach in their national qualifications framework or system, in arrangements for recognition of prior learning and

in credit accumulation and transfer systems. This is the main direct angle of interest of CATS in the context of ACQF.

This Guideline does not impose on countries and regions new CATS rules and mechanisms, but proposes a framework of principles, criteria and processes that can inspire and orient the national and regional authorities and stakeholders in developing CATS or improving and consolidating already existing systems. In accordance with the approach of voluntary cooperation of the ACQF, this Guideline is a reference and acts as a recommendation.

**Table 1: Quality assurance in the context of ACQF referencing criteria**

ACQF Referencing criteria	
1	There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications framework or system and the level descriptors of the ACQF.
2	<b>The national qualifications frameworks or systems are based on learning outcomes principles and related to arrangements for recognition of prior learning (including non-formal and informal) and, where appropriate, to credit systems.</b>
3	There are transparent processes and procedures for including qualifications in the NQF or for describing the place of qualifications in the NQS and information on qualifications is accessible, trustworthy and verifiable in a national register(s) of qualifications.
4	The national quality assurance system for education and training refers to the national qualifications framework or system and is consistent with the principles of quality assurance of the African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF).

Source: ACQF Guideline 3 on referencing (draft 1 of December 2021).

*For more information on referencing to ACQF: refer to ACQF Guideline 3.*

### a) Key Principles of CATS

The following are the principles underpinning CATS:

**Principle 1:** CATS should be formulated with a view to promoting learner mobility across sectors, levels and types of qualifications by eliminating duplication of learning.

The system should eliminate unnecessary duplication of learning and support different learning pathways through the recognition of credit that learners have gained from learning already undertaken. This entails that learners should not be requested to repeat learning if the prior learning could be duly recognised as equivalent and counted towards further learning.

**Principle 2:** *Systems and procedures developed in institutions to support CAT should be transparent, fair, flexible and easy to use.*

- (i) Institutions should provide clear, reliable and easy to use information on their CATS and procedures. Any restriction and limits on transfer of credit, such as the 'shelf-life' of credits (if any) and ceiling of transfer should be specified, along with the implications for progression, grading or final award classification. Information on formal articulation pathways and credit transfer agreements between institutions should also be included. In addition, information on the criteria for selection, the number of credits to be awarded, and additional programme requirements, if there are any, should be provided. Further, the CATS and its procedures should be easy to understand and use, both on the part of the learner and the institution.

- (ii) Given the multiplicity of institutions, programmes and learners, it is unlikely that individual components in one programme will be identical in all respect to components in another programme. In order to simplify procedures and to ensure maximum benefit for learners, institutions should adopt a flexible approach to the recognition of credits. Institutions should consider adopting a recognition approach based on a review of learning outcomes, rather than seeking perfect equivalence between two qualifications or programmes.

**Principle 3:** *Decisions regarding credit transfer should be timely, academically defensible and equitable, and based on learning outcomes.*

Decisions on credit transfer should be evidence-based, equitable, academically defensible, consistently applied and communicated to applicants within a specified timeframe, to avoid delaying a qualified learner's access to a programme of study.

In determining the eligibility of credits for recognition and transfer towards a new qualification, receiving institutions should satisfy themselves that the associated learning outcomes attained are comparable to the required outcomes of the new programme.

**Principle 4:** Credit awarded in recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning is of equal standing to credit awarded through formal learning.

All accredited and verified learning (including formal, non-formal and informal learning) should be eligible for consideration for credit award. Receiving institutions should recognise learning achieved by a learner at any time and in any context on an equal basis, provided that the learning outcomes have been appropriately assessed and matched with the requirements of the qualification applied for.

**Principle 5:** In line with the concept of institutional autonomy, CAT should not affect the authority of a receiving institution to make decisions about the admission of learners.

The CATS should facilitate the recognition of credit for entry into a qualification (that is, admission to a programme) as well as recognition of credit towards the award of a qualification (that is, granting course exemption from part of the qualification). While an open and transparent CATS will facilitate learners' progression, admission is a matter for the receiving institution.

**Principle 6:** Credit recognition and credit transfer should not undermine the academic rigour or integrity of the qualification into which the learner is accepted.

- (i) Institutions must ensure that recognising the credit earned by a learner towards the completion of a programme does not adversely affect the integrity and quality of their qualifications. Institutions should determine the maximum amount of credit which can be transferred (or the minimum amount of study which must be undertaken at the awarding institution to be eligible for an award). It is common practice for institutions to accept the transfer of credit from other institutions up to a ceiling of 50% of the total credits required for the award of a qualification.

**Principle 7:** *Institutional commitment and cooperation is central to the optimal functionality of CATS.*

- (i) The CATS should be adopted by the (i) relevant decision-making body of the institution and its implementation fully supported and appropriately resourced.
- (ii) Articulation agreements between institutions should protect and preserve the academic standards of each institution as well as the integrity of their qualifications. Agreements should be documented and promulgated and be subject to regular review and update as the programmes evolve and

develop over time. Further, institutional collaboration should ensure appropriate dovetailing of curriculum content and learning outcomes and facilitate maximum credit recognition and transfer.

**Principle 8:** *CATS and its procedures should be subject to rigorous quality assurance measures.*

- (i) Credit transfer and articulation agreements should be subject to normal Quality Assurance arrangements. Implementation of CAT should be kept under regular review by the institutions and the relevant quality assurance bodies managing the NQF sub frameworks to ensure that it is functioning effectively. Issues surrounding credit accumulation and transfer should form part of regular internal programme review and collaborating partners should hold regular meetings to ensure continued alignment between their programmes.
- (ii) Institutions should consider building up a database of CAT activities, including statistical information on the number and origin of learners to whom credit transfer has been granted, as well as on their performance in comparison to other learners with normal entry. This will help assess the effectiveness of the CATS and inform changes to enhance the quality of the system. Further, feedback from stakeholders should be sought with a view to sharing good practice and addressing issues that may have arisen.

### 3.3.3 CAT Implementation Stages

In general, the operation of a CAT system will involve the following stages<sup>2</sup>:

#### **Stage 1: Establishing an Administrative Structure for the CATS**

A clear structure should be established for the administration and implementation of CAT. The roles and duties of persons responsible for processing CAT applications should be clearly defined. Where it is considered necessary, a special committee or panel may be set up to deal with the assessment and decision-making processes. There should be separation of responsibility between those responsible for the assessment and those responsible for approval of the applications. In addition, administrative support should be provided to staff holding different positions in the structure.

#### **Stage 2: Providing Information to Learners**

Institutions should provide clear and easily accessible information with relevant application forms and prospectus of learning programmes to learners to assist them understand the available CAT arrangements, including the following:

- a) How the CATS operates for purposes of credit transfer.
- b) Opportunities for articulation from a specific programme offered by the institution to another programme offered by the same or other institution.
- c) Credit transfer agreements reached between institutions.

#### **Stage 3: Processing Applications for Credit Transfer**

##### **a) Key elements to consider**

During the processing of applications for credit transfer, the following are the key elements to consider:

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<sup>2</sup> Zambia Qualifications Authority (2020). *Guidelines for the Development of Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems*, Lusaka, Zambia.

- i) Assessment of the application should be carried out by persons or unit designated for the task. The person responsible for assessing the applications should have knowledge in the subject of the learning programme involved and also experience or training in processing CAT applications. The involvement of a second person in the examination of the application and the documentary evidence is common and advisable, especially in complex cases.
- ii) The assessment should be based on the information provided by the applicants. Besides, blanket approval of credit transfer from a certain programme under, for instance, an agreement between two institutions may be considered. For other individual cases, recommendations on the approval or non-approval of the applications should be made on a case-by-case basis.

#### **b) Assessing the relevance of the qualification**

In assessing the relevance of a qualification and the associated programme undertaken by the applicant for the purpose of credit transfer, the following factors are considered relevant:

##### **i) NQF Level of a Qualification**

- The NQF level of a qualification is benchmarked against the level descriptors of the NQF in terms of the standards attained under different domains (knowledge, skills and competence). Receiving institutions should have confidence in NQF-recognised qualifications.
- The overall NQF level of a qualification is indicative of the level of complexity of the programme associated with the qualification and will be useful for assessing whether the learning achieved from the programme should be accepted for credit transfer to a receiving programme.
- As a general principle, institutions should accept a credit transfer application from a programme at the same or higher level than the receiving programme. Acceptance of a programme of a lower level for credit transfer may be possible in some circumstances, but the receiving institution should evaluate the comparability of learning outcomes and the potential impact on the academic integrity and standard of the receiving programme.

##### **ii) Assessment of Learning Outcomes**

- Credits should be awarded on the premise that learners have been assessed as having achieved the learning outcomes specified for the programme.
- The receiving institution should ascertain that the learning outcomes achieved by the applicant in a previous programme are comparable to those of the receiving programme for which credit recognition is sought. Institutions should accept that two programmes or courses/ modules are of a substantial degree of comparability if there is at least 70% match, and hence should be accepted for credit transfer.
- Where it is not practicable to conduct direct mapping of the relevant content of two programmes, institutions could adopt the fair recognition approach and review the learning outcomes of the programmes based on a broad comparison of the knowledge, skills and competencies expected to be achieved in the programmes.
- Where necessary, the institution may conduct interviews with the applicants to ascertain their learning experience for the consideration of credit transfer. A panel involving experts or external members may be formed to conduct the assessment.

### **iii) Programme Duration and Credit**

The duration of a programme and its credit value give an indication on the learning quantity and breadth of the learning programme, which is useful information for assessing credit transfer applications. The adoption of the credit as a common currency for measuring the quantity of learning of a programme effectively facilitates the comparison of two programmes for credit recognition and transfer.

### **iv) Syllabus, Curriculum and Associated Programme Procedures**

- In addition to the transcript, the syllabus and the curriculum content should also be considered to understand the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in the programme.
- It should be noted that all credits earned from an accredited institution shall be transferrable. Depending on the shelf-life of the subject knowledge, receiving institutions may recognise learning achieved by a learner at any time or a certain period of time, provided that the learning outcomes have been appropriately assessed and matched with the requirements of the qualification applied for. For the purpose of credit transfer, assessed qualifications obtained through non-formal and informal learning channels should be given equal standing to qualifications obtained through formal education.
- The procedures for application for credit transfer may vary among institutions or even individual departments within the same institution. It is in the interest of the institutions and learners that the procedures should, as far as possible, be standardised and streamlined.
- Standardised application forms, in paper and electronic formats, should be provided to applicants together with clear guidance notes, which should contain any information that may be considered useful by the applicants and even internal staff of the institutions, including:
  - a) Application procedures.
  - b) The purposes for applying for credit transfer and related requirements.
  - c) Required supporting documents.
  - d) Fees and refund arrangements, if any.
  - e) Estimated time required for processing the application.
  - f) Details of the contact person(s) for enquiry.
- Institutions should give advice on the types of documentary evidence which may be required to support the application. In respect of a recognised qualification already obtained by the applicant, the certificate, and other supporting documents such as transcript, course outlines, curriculum and outcome statements, will be useful. In respect of credits acquired through non-formal and informal learning, evidence including the statement of achievement from awarding bodies, licenses issued by relevant authorities, certificates of international awards or reference letters from employers, will be useful to demonstrate the learning achieved and standard attained.
- The awarding institution has the responsibility to assist its graduates in obtaining the necessary documentation to support further progression. Graduates who wish to apply for credit transfer based on a completed programme should directly approach the institution concerned for the supply of documentation, certification, and other assistance to facilitate their application for credit transfer to a programme offered by another institution.

#### Stage 4: Decision Making and Approval of Applications

- (i) The persons responsible for assessing applications for credit transfer should refer to set principles and procedures to ensure consistency before making a recommendation to the relevant authority for approval.
- (ii) The approval authority may make decisions on an application for credit transfer in one or more of the following ways:
  - a) **Credit transfer and Articulation to Receiving Programme:** An application for credit transfer may be accepted based on the learning achieved in a previously completed programme. The total credit requirement in the receiving programme may be reduced in block, e.g. a Diploma holder may be allowed to enter the senior year of a Bachelor's degree programme (block credits). This entails reducing the total credit of the receiving programme by the amount of credits from the completed programme.
  - b) **Course Exemption:** An applicant may be exempted from taking a specific course or module of a programme based on the learning achieved in previous studies. This is applicable to both completed and uncompleted programmes.
- (iii) Institutions should consider setting a maximum ("ceiling") for the number of credits that may be granted to an applicant to safeguard the academic integrity and standard of their programmes. Generally, institutions commonly accept the transfer of credit from previous studies up to a ceiling of 50% of the total credits required for completion of a programme.
- (iv) Notwithstanding the above, there are cases in which more than 50% of the total credits required may be granted. The ceiling for credit transfer may be more flexibly determined where the transfer is from programmes offered by the same institution and where the contents of the courses/ modules involved dovetail with each other by design.
- (v) The use of different credit units does not prevent the recognition of previous learning achieved by learners for articulation to another qualification. Institutions should assess and validate the learning outcomes achieved by the learner on a case-by-case basis, with reference to their CATS and established norms. Where a different credit unit is adopted, institutions may refer to the conversion formula established between the different credit currencies.
- (vi) Upon completion of the assessment and approval process, the institution should timely notify the applicant of the result of the application in writing. The notification, in letter or electronic form, should state the decision in respect of the application and the effect of the credit transfer on the programme to be enrolled (e.g., number of credits to be transferred, courses to be exempted, additional courses required for graduation, fees reduced and expiry date of the transfer).
- (vii) It is good management practice that for non-approval cases, the institution should give reasons for the decisions.
- (viii) An applicant reserves the right to appeal against the decision of the institution using the appropriate institutional procedure.



## Stage 5: Documentation and Record Keeping

Credit transfer decisions and justifications for the decisions should be properly recorded and documented by institutions for future reference. Credit transfer decisions, including the credits granted and courses exempted should be reflected in the learner's transcript.

### Quality Assurance of CATS

Education and training institutions shall be expected to implement the following measures to assure quality:

- (i) **Document CAT Processes:** rules and guidelines on how to compare learning outcomes, notional hours, content and competences should be clearly documented.
- (ii) **Establish Internal Quality Committees:** to regulate adherence of the CATS to requirements.
- (iii) **Develop Articulation and Access Procedures:** progression within sub frameworks should be clearly outlined.

Feedback from teaching staff and learners on credit transfer should be obtained by means of surveys, student-staff consultation meetings, staff questionnaires, staff sharing sessions and any other appropriate means to assess the effectiveness of the CATS.

As part of the regular programme review, institutions should include in programme review documents reports on CAT implementation together with statistical data, analysis and evaluation. Issues identified from the review should be dealt with promptly at the appropriate level.

## 3.4 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) / Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE)

People learn anytime, everywhere throughout life, not only in formal education and training systems and pathways, but also in non-formal and informal learning contexts. Outcomes of prior learning in all contexts of life can be validated, recognised, certified to give people wings to new perspectives and opportunities in education and training, employment, entrepreneurship, better jobs. Across the world, countries and regional communities increasingly recognise the value of non-formal and informal learning and many are establishing systems to acknowledge competencies gained through non-formal and informal modalities. The growth of digital and online learning and access to digital skills assessment tools are new dimensions and potentialities of RPL/VAE, which can benefit candidates and RPL/VAE systems.

Recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience aims at allowing learners who may have not been able to attend formal education but have managed to gain significant experience in a particular field to be given an opportunity to earn a qualification or to upgrade an existing qualification. RPL/VAE is a vital tool in facilitating lifelong learning, and is especially important in a context of rapid transformation of work, jobs and technologies, requiring individuals to learn in all contexts.

Assessment of learning from experience and consideration of relevant competences and equivalences contained in a qualification require a set of nationally agreed criteria, policies and procedures which each African State should endeavour to develop and implement.

### 3.4.1 Who can benefit of RPL / validation?

- Individuals who have knowledge, skills, competences – but not a qualification. RPL / VAE is not suitable for individuals without experience, skills, and competences.

- The individual is at the centre of RPL / VAE policies and processes.

### 3.4.2 What is assessed, validated?

- The learning outcomes achieved through prior learning, not the prior learning itself.

### 3.4.3 Results of RPL / VAE process can be:

- full qualification
- partial qualification
- credits or units towards a qualification
- exemption from an academic prerequisite for entering the formal education and training system or from all or part of the curriculum
- positioning potential learners on formal learning pathways (e.g. before continuing training)
- certificate of labour market competencies or
- non recognition.

### 3.4.4 Digital / virtual assessment of competences, tools, and platforms

Digital transformation is having a considerable impact on RPL / VAE practices and guidance. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the digital transition and recognition / validation and career guidance services had to adapt to distance service delivery. In this context, all services are changing to a new reality in which ICT becomes an embedded component of the service, not just a different form of service delivery (Cedefop, 2022).

Assessment is one aspect of education and training which has begun to be delivered through online or digital modalities. Virtual assessment provides i) e-assessments in which students complete electronic or digitised assessments in a virtual learning environment, and/or ii) fully- or partially-online simulation environments which replicate real-life workplace situations, allowing aspects of competency-based assessment in a controlled environment (ACQF Guideline 9: Innovation and Technology. 2022, forthcoming).

*Context:* The Covid-19 pandemic forced education institutions to migrate to online teaching, learning and assessment. This exposed both the weaknesses of systems and the opportunities inherent in distance education, which can improve access for students in rural and remote areas, as well as improving the efficiencies of systems by unblocking constraints such as limited physical environments or space for assessments, limited numbers of qualified assessors or the lack of assessors in specific areas.

*Rationale:* Virtual assessment can include the application of skills in context, interviews and role-playing as well as traditional assessments and reduce the financial costs associated with traditional assessment. In cases where the assessment is supported by back-end analytics, detailed data can be gathered and some aspects of marking may be automated, increasing efficiency. Data such as videos, automated marks and portfolios can be reviewed from any location, in some cases reducing pressure on available resources.

### 3.4.5 Types of learning to be considered for RPL/VAE

The following types of learning should be considered for RPL/VAE:

- Non-formal – learning obtained through organised training not leading to an award (e.g. an agriculture training, college, faith – based institution, in private and public enterprises, etc.).
- Informal – learning obtained through experience, including at work in enterprises, informal sector employment and volunteering.
- Formal – learning obtained through organized training in a school system from pre-school to a university leading to an award. This type of learning is validated and recognised through the CAT System.

The table below illustrates the types of learning that is recognised through the RPL/VAE route in selected countries.

S/N	COUNTRY	TYPE OF LEARNING RECOGNISED
1.	Angola	Non-formal and Informal
2.	Cape Verde	Non-formal and Informal
3.	Kenya	Formal, Non-formal and Informal
4.	Lesotho	Formal, Non-formal and Informal
5.	Mauritius	Formal, Non-formal and Informal
6.	Morocco	Non-formal and Informal
7.	Mozambique	Non-formal and Informal
8.	Seychelles	Formal, Non-formal and Informal
9.	South Africa	Formal, Non-formal and Informal
10.	Zambia	Formal, Non-formal and Informal

**Note:** In the case of Lesotho, RPL/VAE is provided for in the Lesotho Qualifications Framework but the policy and guidelines are yet to be developed.

### 3.4.6 Implementation of RPL/VAE in the context of the ACQF

RPL/VAE under the ACQF will promote common understanding of the various forms of learning previously undertaken, regardless of the learning mode used. Without prejudice to national and regional diversity of policies and practices, it shall promote mobility and expand access of target groups to employment opportunities and further studies. In addition, the RPL/VAE under the ACQF will support countries in domesticating or adapting the principles and procedures at national level.

**The proposed framework of principles of RPL/VAE is indicative, for debate and further development. These principles are based on practices and policies in application in a number of countries<sup>3</sup>. This draft Guideline will benefit of additional inputs and elaboration, based on a process of targeted discussion and comparative analysis of a range of relevant RPL/VAE experiences in African countries.**

#### A. Guiding Principles

The guiding principles of RPL/VAE proposed in this first draft Guideline are structured by themes: **policies and procedures, information, roles and responsibilities, support, monitoring and review.**

Principles to guide the implementation of RPL/VAE include:

##### i) Policies and Procedures

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<sup>3</sup> Zambia Qualifications Authority (2016). *Policy and Criteria for Recognition of Prior Learning in Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia.*

**Principle 1:** Focus of RPL processes is on the candidate / learner and his / her outcomes of learning, not on the learning pathway or status of institution or place where the learning was obtained.

**Principle 2:** Equality of qualifications documents: no distinction between records of learner achievements for qualifications (or part qualifications) awarded as a result of RPL processes and those obtained via formal education processes. This principle is fundamental in view of RPL's key contribution to social inclusion of individuals.

**Principle 3:** Qualifications (and part-qualifications) registered in the NQF may be awarded in whole or in part through RPL. RPL processes should be credible, quality-assured and consistent with the NQF principles, levels, and standards.

**Principle 4:** *Decisions regarding the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.*

- Where recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience is being sought for the award of credits, the awarding body will assure itself that the learning derived from experience or prior certificated study is equivalent to that of the its programme of study. In reaching a decision about the equivalence of learning, the awarding body should consider a combination of skills and learning outcomes as well as the level and relevance of the subject knowledge and understanding to be evidenced by a learner.
- As with other methods used to assess student's learning and achievement, the awarding body should ensure that the decision-making process used to assess a claim for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience, and the outcomes of this process, are transparent, consistent, repeatable and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

**Principle 5:** *Where limits are compulsory on the proportion of learning/ acquired experience that can be recognised, these limits should be explicitly stated. The implications for progression, the award of a qualification and its classification should be clear and transparent.*

- In recognising prior learning/ validating acquired experience, the awarding body will describe and explain their decisions for stipulating limits, if any, on the volume of learning that can be achieved through the recognition/validation process. Limits may be applied to the smallest or a maximum amount of learning that can be claimed. For example, a module or cluster of learning outcomes may be applied for recognition/ validation.
- When deciding whether limits are compulsory on the proportion of a qualification that may be recognised, the awarding body shall consider appropriateness of the use of credits to award or claim exemptions.
- The awarding body may also wish to include in its submission consideration of whether learning derived from experience which is recognised should be graded and, if so, how. Similarly, useful consideration may also be given to whether grades awarded by another awarding body can be accepted, when a claim for the recognition of prior certificated learning/ validated acquired experience has been successful.
- Learners will need to be made aware of any limitations to progression or the range of qualification classifications that are normally available in a programme of study, which may apply if their application is successful.

**Principle 6:** *Prior experiential or certificated learning that has been recognised by the awarding body shall be clearly identified on student transcripts.*

- The awarding body shall identify how the recognition of prior learning may be stated on student transcripts of learning.

## ii) Information

**Principle 1:** *The awarding body should provide clear and accessible information for learners, teaching and instructional staff, examiners, assessors and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience in accordance with the NQF level descriptors.*

- The awarding body shall develop their own policies, procedures and practices for the recognition of prior learning, reflecting their individual organisational structures and missions.

**Principle 2:** *The terminology, scope and boundaries used by the awarding body in its policies, procedures and practices for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience shall be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.*

- The awarding bodies are encouraged to clearly set out and unambiguously define the terms they have adopted in the documentation setting out their policies, procedures and approaches regarding recognition of prior learning.

**Principle 3:** *Information and guidance materials outlining the process for assessing of claims for the recognition of prior experiential or previously certificated learning shall be clear, accurate and easily accessible.*

- Each of the stages in processes for the assessment of claims for the recognition of prior empirical or prior certificated learning should be carefully and clearly identified.

**Principle 4:** *The awarding bodies should state the range and form of assessment appropriate to consider claims for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience.*

- The awarding bodies should state the range of assessment tools to be used in assessing claims for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience and the appropriateness of such tools.

**Principle 5:** *Criteria to be used in judging a claim for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience should be made explicit to learners, teaching and instructional staff, stakeholders as well as assessors and examiners.*

- The process, rules and regulations for assessing an application for recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience should be clearly stipulated by the awarding body.

**Principle 6:** *The assessment of learning derived from experience shall be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assurance procedures.*

- The assessment of learning derived from experience should, in general, be subject to the same institutional internal and external quality assurance procedures as assessment of learning through more traditional routes.

## iii) Roles and Responsibilities

**Principle 1:** *The scope of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience should be clearly specified.*

- The awarding bodies should outline clearly where the authority lies for making the decision to recognise learning derived from experience or prior certificated study, and the procedures to be followed.

#### iv) Support

**Principle 1:** *Awarding bodies should give clear guidance to learners about when a claim for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience may be submitted, the timescale for considering the claim and the outcome.*

- The procedure for RPL/VAE should clearly stipulate timelines for processing of applications.

**Principle 2:** *Awarding bodies should make appropriate arrangements to support learners submitting claims for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience and to provide feedback on decisions.*

- The procedure for RPL/VAE should clearly provide for adequate guidance to the applicants for preparing applications and for timely feedback.

#### v) Monitoring and Review

**Principle 1:** *Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience should be clearly established. These arrangements should be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.*

- Regular review of policies and practices will enable the awarding body to assure itself, learners, partner organisations and stakeholders of the quality of its approach towards the recognition of prior learning and the maintenance of academic standards.
- The assurance of quality and standards should be included in an institution's general procedures.

### B. Putting RPL/VAE systems into practice

RPL/VAE is a process composed of different stages and activities through which the candidates discover, describe, document their experiences and competences, and engage with the steps leading to assessment. For many individuals, this process is life-changing and highly demanding. Information and guidance is important throughout the process.

The stages in RPL/VAE implementation differ from country to country. The figure 1 illustrates the RPL/VAE implementation stages in selected African countries.

**Figure 1:** RPL / VAE processes (phases) in selected African countries



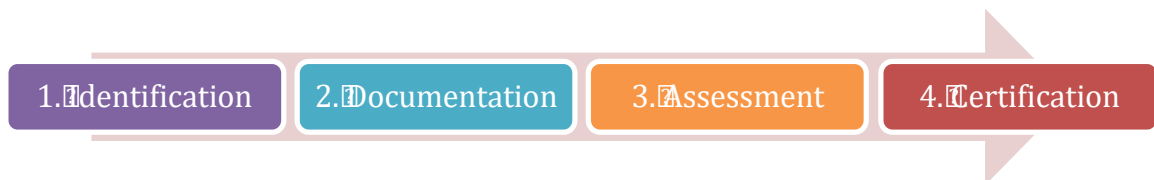
Besides the country comparison above, the generic RPL/VAE processes according to the SADC, International Labour Organisation and the European guidelines are as depicted in the figure 2.

**Figure 2:** RPL / VAE processes (phases) in regional blocks / communities

1. In Southern African Development Community



2. In the EU



3. According to International Labour Organisation (ILO), RPL Training Package, 2018



While countries and regional blocks have developed different strategies and approaches to conducting

and implementing the validation of prior learning, the general approach to the implementation of RPL/VAE may involve the following four stages<sup>4</sup>:

**i) Identification**

This stage involves the identification of knowledge, skills and competence acquired by an individual. The identification and awareness of one's own capabilities is an important aspect of the RPL/VAE process. The methods to be used in the identification of knowledge, skills and competence must be open to a range of knowledge, skills and competences that may be considered.

At this stage, candidates are also informed about the entire RPL/VAE process which covers application procedures, organising a portfolio of evidence, applicable fees, the assessment process, the available support and the eligibility requirements.

**ii) Documentation**

This stage involves provision of evidence of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired. This can be done by building a portfolio of evidence which may include curriculum vitae, completed assessment items from study previously undertaken, supervisor recommendation letters, log books, etc. This evidence must provide sufficient insight into the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired. In some jurisdictions, identification and documentation stages can be combined into one stage of collecting evidence to build the portfolio of evidence that will be assessed.

**iii) Assessment stage**

The assessment stage aims to ensure that the documented evidence collected and presented by the candidate in the application stage corresponds to the actual competences that the candidate possesses. The process comprises theoretical and practical examination of the candidate in addition to evaluating the applicant's portfolio.

The evidence for assessment of RPL/VAE should include:

- Interviews;
- Observation and questioning, including visits to places of work;
- Portfolio of work. This may include completed assessment items from study previously undertaken;
- Supplementary assessment tasks or challenge test (oral, written or practical);
- Assessment where no training is involved;
- Trade tests; and
- Authentication of evidence by supervisor or employer.

**iv) Certification stage**

The certification stage represents the final stage of the RPL/VAE process and corresponds to the issue of an official document indicating whether applicants have received a full or partial validation.

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<sup>4</sup> Cedefop (2015). *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 104. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2801/008370>



All units of competency successfully recognised as part of the application for RPL/VAE should be listed on the appropriate certification documentation.

As part of the certification process, the assessing institution should:

- Compile the assessment results and generate a report;
- Communicate the result to the candidates;
- Issue certificates to the successful candidates, as well as provide feedback on the performance to the unsuccessful candidates.

### 3.4.7 Conclusion

Generally, three (3) modes are used to validate and recognise learning globally, namely; recognition of qualifications, credit accumulation and transfer systems and recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience. In most countries in Africa, recognition of qualifications involves establishing the legal status of the awarding body, ascertaining the authenticity of the qualification and assessing the comparability of qualification. It can be observed from both the international and country perspectives elaborated in Chapter 3 that RPL/VAE encompasses all forms of learning regardless of the how the learning was achieved, be it in a formal, non-formal or informal setting. It should be noted that in validating and recognising learning acquired in a formal setting, the credit accumulation and transfer system is utilised. Countries in Africa are encouraged to put in place policies, guidelines and systems to facilitate the validation and recognition of all forms of learning.

### 3.4.8 Reflective questions

- 1) In your own words, define the modes used for the validation and recognition of learning.
- 2) With reference to your country, explain the role of the competent recognition authorities and education institutions that are involved in the recognition of qualifications.
- 3) You have been drawn into a team of experts to offer advice to your government on the impending development of policies and guidelines on the validation and recognition of learning. Briefly discuss the key features or principles to be considered under the following:
  - a) Policy on recognition of prior learning/ validation of acquired experience.
  - b) Policy on recognition of qualification.
  - c) Guideline for credit accumulation and transfer systems.
- 4) Learning achieved through non-formal and informal settings should not be of equal standing to formal learning. Argue for or against this statement.
- 5) With the aid of a process flow chart, discuss the four (4) stages in the implementation of RPL/VAE.

## CHAPTER 4: SYSTEMATIC EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN ACQF, NQF INSTITUTIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS RECOGNITION BODIES

### Learning objectives:

At the end of this chapter, the learner should be able to:

- a) Explain the importance of having adequate and clear information on each Member State's education and training system; and
- b) Explain how the ACQF intends to contribute to information sharing on the qualification frameworks and education systems.

### 4.1 Information on Member state's Education and Training System

In line with the Addis Convention<sup>5</sup> and the Global Convention<sup>6</sup>, each Member State should ensure that to facilitate the validation and recognition of learning, adequate and clear information on its education and training system and NQF is provided.

### 4.2 ACQF contribution to information sharing

ACQF aims at contributing to such information-sharing, building on the enhanced transparency and comparability of qualifications and qualifications frameworks or systems. This objective of the ACQF will be supported by the proposed ACQF Qualifications Platform, the ACQF Website and the results of referencing of national qualifications frameworks or systems to ACQF.

### 4.3 Conclusion

The processes of validation and recognition of learning are premised on reliable information on NQFs, NQSS, qualifications, quality assurance systems and education systems. Hence, Member States should put in place mechanisms to ensure the availability and timely provision of such information whenever required by other Member States.

### 4.4 Reflective questions

- 1) Your colleague is wondering whether it is important to have adequate and clear information on your country's education system. Explain to your colleague the importance of having adequate and clear information on your country's education and training system, citing examples where necessary.

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<sup>5</sup> Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications on Higher Education in African States (Addis Convention).

<sup>6</sup> Global Convention of the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education.

- 2) Explain two (2) mechanisms through which exchange of information between ACQF, NQF institutions and qualifications recognition bodies could be enhanced.

## CHAPTER 5: GUIDANCE FOR TRAINING/ LEARNING

This section provides guidance to trainers and learners on the various aspects pertaining to the conducting of training and learning based on this Training Module.

a) Recommended Pre-requisite (baseline learner's background):

i) General knowledge and understanding of at least one of the following areas:

- National/Regional/International Qualifications Frameworks/ Systems
- Quality assurance of learning programmes
- Curriculum development
- Education systems.

ii) Practical experience in at least one of the following areas:

- Validation and recognition of qualifications
- Development of curricula
- Quality assurance of learning programmes
- Development or implementation of National/Regional/International Qualifications Frameworks/ Systems
- Setting or implementing qualification standards.

b) Notional time to complete the module:

The recommended notional time for completing the module is as 20 hrs distributed as follows:

- Reading: 6 hrs
- Face-to-face: 10 hrs
- Assessment: 4 hrs.

c) **Materials:**

- Training Module on validation and recognition of learning
- Guideline 4 on validation and recognition of learning
- ACQF Website (<https://acqf.africa/>)
- Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States.  
[http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=49282&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html#STATE\\_PARTIES](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49282&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html#STATE_PARTIES)
- Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education  
[http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=49557&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49557&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).
- Websites of National/Regional Qualifications Authorities
- Websites of Competent Authorities

#### **d) Organisation:**

The training will be delivered in three ways, namely:

- Self-paced learning (individual),
- Teacher / trainer / facilitator directed learning – which may include group learning, and
- A combination of the above.

This will be achieved through the following delivery and learning modes:

- Online
- Face-to-face
- Blended

#### **e) Assessment:**

- The assessment will comprise questions, debates, presentations, case studies and practical exercises as elaborated in section 6.
- It is suggested that the weighting of the notional time required to complete the assessment(s) should not exceed 10% of the overall notional time allocated to the specific module.

## **CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT**

The assessment modalities will comprise the following:

- Assessment questions hinging on the overall module and section specific learning outcomes (to be addressed individually or as a group response)
- Debate with other learners individually or in a group
- Individual/ group presentation
- Response to case studies, if necessary
- Practical exercises

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## ANNEXES

### Annex 1: Glossary

**Access:** The possibility for eligible candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to education.

**Accreditation:** A process of assessment and review that enables an education programme or institution to be recognised or certified by the appointed body as meeting appropriate standards.

**Accreditation Mill:** A business posing as an accreditation agency, with the following characteristics:

- No recognition as an accrediting body by competent national authorities;
- Claims to provide accreditation without having any authorisation to do so; and
- Its accreditation decisions may be purchased for a fee without an actual review.

**Acquired Experience:** Experience that has been acquired in different ways.

**Admission:** The authorisation of qualified applicants to pursue studies at a given institution and/or in a given programme.

**African Continental Qualifications Framework:** The ACQF is a policy initiative of the African Union and its development process is underway (2019-2022). The current vision for the ACQF is: to enhance comparability, quality and transparency of qualifications from all sub-sectors and levels of education and training; facilitate recognition of diplomas and certificates; work in cooperation and complementarity with national and regional qualifications frameworks; promote cooperation and alignment between qualifications frameworks (national and regional) in Africa and worldwide.

**Articulation:** The process of forming systemic, specific and individual possibilities of connection between qualifications and/or part-qualifications to allow for the horizontal/ lateral, vertical and diagonal movement of learners through the formal education and training system and its linkages with the world of work. Horizontal articulation is articulation within and between NQF Sub-Frameworks, on the same NQF level whereas vertical articulation is across NQF levels within an NQF Sub-Framework. Diagonal articulation refers to articulation across NQF levels and across NQF Sub-Frameworks;

**Authorisation:** A permit delivered by a body officially mandated to authorise the creation of an institution or a new branch of specialisation in an education institution.

**Awarding body:** A body issuing qualifications formally recognising the achievements of an individual, following a standard assessment procedure.

**Competence:** 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.

**Competent authority:** An individual or entity that has the authority, capacity, or legal power to perform a designated function.

**Competent recognition authority:** An entity which, in accordance with the laws, regulations, policies, or practices of a Member State, assesses qualifications and/or makes decisions on the recognition of qualifications.

**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.

**Diploma Mill:** A business posing as an educational institution, with the following characteristics:

- Sells bogus qualifications without any requirements for (serious) study, research or examination;
- Does not have recognition by national competent authorities or lawful accreditation, even though it may possess a license to operate as a business;
- Usually has no physical presence and operates online.

**Education:** All programmes of learning, study, or sets of courses of study, training, or training for research which are recognised by the relevant authorities of a Member State as belonging to its education system.

**Education Institution:** An institution providing education and recognised by the competent authority of a Member State as belonging to its education system.

**Formal learning:** 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. Also known as formal education and training

**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:**

- Results of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do upon completion of a learning process
- 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.

**Level:** One of the series of levels of learning achievement according to which an NQF or RQF is organised. Levels are typically arranged in ascending order, from lowest to highest, depending on the number of levels in the NQF or RQF.

**Level descriptor:** A statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level.

**Lifelong learning:**

- Education through experience and formal or informal studies covering the entire span of one's life

- Learning that takes place in all contexts in life – formally, non-formally and informally. It includes learning behaviours and obtaining knowledge; understanding; attitudes; values and competencies for personal growth, social and economic wellbeing, democratic citizenship, cultural identity and employability.

**Mobility:**

- The physical or virtual movement of individuals outside their country for the purpose of studying, researching, teaching, or working.
- Ability of an individual to move and adapt to a new occupational or educational environment. Mobility can be geographical or "functional" (a move to a new post in a company or to a new occupation, a move between employment and education); mobility enables individuals to acquire new skills and this increase their employability).

**National 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.
- An instrument for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies along a continuum of agreed levels. It is a way of structuring existing and new qualifications, which are defined by learning outcomes – clear statements of what the learner must know or be able to do, whether learned in a classroom, on the job, or less formally. The qualifications framework indicates the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another, within and across occupations or industrial sectors (and even across vocational and academic fields if the NQF is designed to include both vocational and academic qualifications in a single framework)

**National 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.

**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

**Partial Studies:** Education whose duration or content is incomplete according to the regulations and rules of the institution, and which, not having resulted in the conferral of a qualification, has been subjected to an evaluation and a validation, in accordance with the regulations and rules of the institution concerned.

**Prior learning:** Learning and/ or experience that have already been acquired in different ways either formal or informal.

**Qualification:** Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by an accredited education institution attesting the successful completion of an approved education programme.

**Qualifications Frameworks:** Systems for classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality assured qualifications.

**Quality assurance:**

- An ongoing process of evaluating and enhancing the quality of a higher education system, institutes or programs to assure stakeholders that acceptable standards are maintained and enhanced
- Processes and procedures for ensuring that qualifications, assessment and programme delivery meet certain standards.

**Recognition:** A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of a party of the value of a foreign education qualification or a validated training.

**Region:** A sub-part of the African continent.

**Regional Qualifications Framework:** A broad structure of levels of learning outcomes that is agreed by countries in a geographical region. A means of enabling one national framework of qualifications to relate to another and, subsequently, for a qualification in one country to be compared to a qualification from another country.

**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.
- Skills means the ability to apply knowledge and use know how to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) or practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

**Stakeholder:** A person or organisation with an interest or concern in something. In vocational education and training, stakeholders include government, providers of training, industry, clients and the community.

**Validation:** Procedure by which a competent authority evaluates qualifications in accordance with norms and standards recognised nationally or internationally.