



Theme 10

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy – Case of Eswatini

2nd NQF Forum: Luanda, Angola
06 September 2024

Background

- ACQF II project
- Development started in September 2023
- RPL Expert visited Eswatini for three days-consultations with stakeholders
- The first draft was produced on the 13th April 2024



RPL consultative workshop – 13 May 2024

- The EQA held a stakeholder consultative meeting on the Draft RPL Policy on Monday, 13 May 2024, at the Eswatini College of Technology.
- The purpose of the meeting was to solicit stakeholder input on the draft policy.
- Another Draft was produced on the 14th June 2024
- We are currently have one that came through on the 14th August 2024



Chapter 1- Introduction

Pointers

- Government envisions an inclusive education system that values and recognises all forms of learning
- Policy developed following extensive consultations with all key stakeholders
- Review of existing practice, identification of gaps and the design of a unified approach to RPL that aligns with national priorities

General Aim

- To provide a national harmonised RPL policy

Purpose

- To provide opportunities for a second chance for achieving a qualification to all learners that are able to prove their learning outcomes acquired from undertaken learning

Scope

- It covers all education and training sectors that issue ESQF qualifications, and labour market occupations that use these qualifications, for recruitment, promotion in employment, and / occupational mobility

Users of the policy

- Organisations registered for awarding qualifications, learners and public bodies interested in qualifications. All individuals interested in giving value and currency to all learning outcomes regardless of how they were acquired.

Monitoring of the implementation of the policy

- EQA together with accreditation bodies in all the subsectors

Chapter 2: Problem Statement

Problem Statement

- The development of the RPL policy is aligned with the broader goals of the Government's Education Sector Strategic Plan and the ESQF which aim to increase equitable access to quality and relevant LLL
- Absence of a standardised RPL policy has created barriers for individuals seeking to validate their learning outcomes
- Situation has led to a mismatch of skills possessed by the workforce and the qualifications needed to access better employment opportunities
- Previous efforts to recognise prior learning have been fragmented with various institutions adopting different approaches

Chapter 3: Overall Policy Goal and Objectives

Policy Goal

- To provide a second chance for individuals to achieve a qualification by recognizing all prior learning outcomes, irrespective of how and where they were acquired.

Objectives

- To enhance access to qualifications through RPL, particularly for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds
- To promote lifelong learning by recognising all forms of learning outcomes and ensuring that they have value within the Eswatini Qualifications Framework and currency in the labour market of Eswatini, and beyond e.g., SADC).
- To ensure that the RPL process is fair, transparent, and accessible to all, providing clear guidelines and standards for implementation

RPL in the Higher Education System

- The policy discusses the role of RPL in promoting inclusive access, lifelong learning, efficient skills utilisation, workforce development, social justice and equity

Practical implementation methods

- Portfolio Assessment: Students compile a portfolio of their experiences and skills, which is assessed by faculty against specific learning outcomes.
- Credit Transfer: Students transfer credits from professional qualifications or previous education to their current programme.
- Challenge Examinations: Students demonstrate proficiency in specific areas through exams, earning credits without attending regular classes.
- Interviews and Assessments: Personalised assessments through interviews and practical evaluations ensure that prior learning meets academic standards.

Practical implementation cont.

- Gap Training: Tailored coursework addresses specific deficiencies in prior learning outcomes, preparing students for successful integration into higher education programmes.
- Articulation Agreements: Formal partnerships between institutions and organisations facilitate credit transfer and seamless transitions into higher education.
- Flexible Admission Policies: These policies consider prior learning alongside traditional qualifications, promoting inclusivity and attracting a diverse student body.

RPL for Early Dropouts from the Formal Initial Education and Training System

- RPL offers a structured mechanism to assess, validate, and recognise competences, providing young people with an opportunity for a pathway to re-enter the formal education and training system and/or improve their employment prospects.
- The policy discusses how RPL provides options for acknowledgement of informal /non formal for all, enhanced employability, re-entry into education system, flexibility and inclusivity, empowerment and confidence building, raising awareness and outreach

RPL and regulated occupations

- Access to regulated occupations – e.g., Health occupations – is usually governed by rules and regulations that go beyond the mere possession of a qualification. These occupations usually require a licence to practice that does not necessarily depend on the education and training or RPL systems; and may depends on the decision of a regulatory body. Therefore, RPL may not always apply in the same way as with regular qualifications, or may not apply at all by Law.

key issues to consider include:

- Stringent certification requirements
- Standardisation and consistency
- Complexity of learning outcomes mapping
- Evidence of learning outcomes
- Regulatory body acceptance
- Stakeholder buy in
- Continuous professional development
- Quality assurance
- Policy and legal barriers

Benefits of RPL for individuals and Eswatini

- Access to formal education and promotion of LLL
- Access to labour markets and workforce development
- Career progression

Benefits of RPL for individuals and Employers

- Saving time and cost
- mobility
- Meeting diverse learning styles

Benefits of RPL cont.

- Inclusivity and diversity
- Aligning with industry needs
- Social equity

CHAPTER 4: Key Issues and Policy Statements

Policy issues

- Qualifications vs skills: Emaswati have skills and competences acquired mostly through practice but have no document /qualification to show for it
- Lack of access to education and training opportunities- overall low completion rates: lack of availability of opportunities for accessing a qualification pathway
- Lack of awareness of alternative routes to qualifications
- Lack of harmonisation of RPL across different HEIs

- Limited access
- Quality and consistency of assessment
- Recognition by employers
- Alignment with industry needs
- Professional Development and RPL Guidance for Assessors

Policy Statements

- Targeted Education and Training Sectors
- Fairness and Equity
- Inclusiveness
- Transparent Assessment Procedures
- Validation of learning outcomes against standards
- Individualised assessment
- Recognition of diverse learning experiences

Policy statements cont.

- Quality assurance
- Appeals process
- Continued professional development for assessors
- Promotion of RPL
- collaboration with stakeholders

Chapter 5: Policy in Practice

Broad Principles of RPL Policy

- Be inclusive, equitable, sensitive to social context of applications
- Be learner-centred and developmental adopting a non-deficit approach to knowledge and skills.
- Complement rather than compete with education and training
- Protect the integrity of qualifications standards, the qualifications system and education/training institutions.
- Be oriented to qualifications that have currency and value in society, especially in the labour market for employers
- Be set at the same standard as formal education and training provision

Broad Principles cont.

- Encourage the development of the TVET and HE systems, whilst evaluating its own impact on society and the economy and its articulation with other parts of the education system and industry.
- Encourage the registration of all qualifications capable of award via RPL on the NQF
- Promote qualifications and credit for unit standards issued on the basis of the training and the RPL system to have the same currency and value

Operating Principles of RPL

The optimal functioning of a labour market requires competent individuals.

Qualifications, registered on the NQF, signal that the holder has demonstrated knowledge and skills in specific occupational activities.

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

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

RPL prerequisites

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

The RPL Process: Operationalisation

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

RPL Process cont.

Key contextual operationalisation steps

- The different stages an individual applicant goes through when engaging in RPL may be summarised in six steps of unequal duration:
- Initial information and guidance, and decision to apply,
- Administrative registration of the individual applicant by the RPL authority,
- Pre-screening by the RPL authority (eligibility),
- Preparatory work by the applicant for final assessment (including for instance elaborating a portfolio of competences),
- Assessment as such (or final assessment, including assessors reviewing all the pieces of evidence and the material provided by the applicant),
- Validation and certification

Assessment

Assessment may rely on several non-mutually exclusive approaches:

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

RPL Governance

The list of stakeholders includes:

- Government ministries, workers, learners, sector councils, unions, TVET, Education sectors, associations- professionals, awarding bodies, RPL facilitators, career counsellors, traditional knowledge keepers, advocacy groups, researchers, etc

RPL Governance: Roles and Responsibilities cont.

The key RPL stakeholders are:

- Employers: create conducive environment for RPL
- RPL providers: provide service that complies with statutory requirements
- RPL applicants: participate in the RPL process and provide appropriate evidence to prove learning outcomes, skills & competences
- RPL guidance officers : support applicants
- RPL assessors: subject specialists in occupational fields

Governance cont.

The Role of the Authority in Overseeing RPL

- Establish a communication policy, inform about objectives and benefits, and reach out to the most in need stakeholders, whether they be individuals, employers, or organisations.
- Fund raise.
- Organise the social dialogue, influence stakeholders and organise a sense of ownership (for further commitment to accept the qualifications that will be awarded to future successful RPL applicants).
- Integrate universities and education stakeholders in the policy framework.
- Design the institutional framework (e.g., identify harbouring institution for the RPL system).
- Identify priority needs.

- Gauge commitment among stakeholders, and promote those who are definitely in.
- Plan for Monitoring and Evaluation.
- Create regulatory tools.
- Decide on eligibility criteria (to have the right to apply for assessment).
- Decide on assessment methods, with quality assurance.
- Decide on final outcomes of the RPL process (exemptions, credits, qualification, certificate).
- Consult and decide on pilots (preferably low hanging fruits, to attract investors and more stakeholders).

- Organise [vertical] pilots, either sector targeted or holistic according to the priority needs.
- Train staff and RPL practitioners, advisors and assessors in the first place.
- Identify top up education and training options, for unsuccessful RPL applicants that needs additional learning to meet the qualification standards.
- Elaborate learning outcomes and standards, following and initial assessment of the adequacy of learning outcomes for an RPL process (many programmes claim they are based on learning outcomes, but they are not actually learning outcomes – time consuming in the latter case).
- Prepare, create or adapt, tools, resources, materials and processes (e.g. information leaflets, assessor's manual or guidance procedures, applicants booklets, assessment procedures and tools, assessment standards...).
- Evaluate impact on formal education and training system (e.g. modularisation, curriculum).
- Compile results from Monitoring and Evaluation of the pilots.

- Organising the debate among key stakeholders for improving the RPL system.
- Feed back into the RPL system.
- Decide on a critical mass for implementing in a sector.
- Up scale.
- Learn from further Monitoring and Evaluation and feed back into the RPL system.
- Improve the education and training system so that it complements the RPL system (e.g., modular provision of formal education and training so that unsuccessful applicants may organise their top-up education and training).

If at all possible, feed back into the formal TVET sector so that all TVET stakeholders benefit from the way the assessment is organised for learning outcomes acquired through experience.

Implementation strategy of RPL

Features of the strategy

- Pragmatic
- Incremental
- Iterative
- Enabling and consensus building

Principles

- Pragmatic- Realistic – Fit for purpose – Implementation
- Iterative- Continuous Learning informing forward movement
- Enabling and Consensus Oriented

Roadmap: phased action plan

The road map may be designed around the following phases:

- **Phase 1:** Scoping, model building and Preparing the Environment
 - Phase 1a: Scoping Existing Practices
 - Phase 1b. Model building and preparing the environment
- **Phase 2.** Establishing an institutional framework (a legislative and a regulatory framework) and a governance system
- **Phase 3.** Modelling RPL (assessment, quality assurance, standards, introduction of ICT)
- **Phase 4.** Developing guidelines (especially for practitioners) and monitoring and evaluation system
- **Phase 5.** Piloting (vertical pilots)
- **Phase 6.** Scaling up for the entire country (implementation plan and timelines)

Risks and Opportunities

Risks

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

Opportunities

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

Monitoring and Evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation system is proposed with

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

Piloting RPL

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

A graphic featuring a blue background with a white ribbon-like shape. The ribbon is folded and contains the text "THANK YOU!" in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. The ribbon has a slight 3D effect with a light grey shadow underneath. The text is centered on the ribbon.

THANK

YOU!