higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK IN THE POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (PSET) SYSTEM

Version 2 – For Public Comment

ACRONYMS [to add]

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale for the RPL Implementation Framework

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a dynamic and transformative process that plays a pivotal role in the educational landscape of South Africa. RPL is one of the mechanisms through which government seeks to redress past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment. The concept of RPL is closely tied to the transformative agenda that emerged post-apartheid. It is part of a national drive to build a learning nation.

RPL is regarded as a pivotal component of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its overarching objectives, which are designed to contribute to the full personal development of every learner or student, and the broader social and economic advancement of the country. These objectives are designed to realise an integrated approach based on outcomes that can be assessed for purposes of mobility, portability, progression and for redress through the recognition of prior learning.

The successful integration of RPL into the education and training system requires a concrete expression in the legislation, policies and practices of key stakeholders involved. The collaborative efforts of entities such as the Department of Higher Education and Training (the Department), South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the three Quality Councils, other government departments and entities, educational institutions, professional bodies, and various organisations have laid the foundation for an enabling policy environment for RPL. This signifies a commitment to recognising and valuing the diverse learning experiences and skills individuals bring to the table, beyond traditional academic pathways. Through the establishment of clear policies and practices, these departments, entities, organisations and institutions aim to facilitate a seamless and equitable process for individuals to have their prior learning acknowledged thereby promoting inclusivity and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the education system.

The Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Innovation (the Minister) published the RPL Coordination Policy in 2016 (Government Notice No. 381 of 2016). The primary objective of this policy is to create an enabling environment for the further development and implementation of RPL within the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system. The policy outlines a two-phase implementation process. In the initial phase, the Department established a national coordinating mechanism with a Reference Group, successfully fulfilling the requirements set out for Phase 1. These include (a) improved collaboration, cooperation and communication with SAQA and the three Quality Councils; (b) provision of guidance, support and training to implementing agencies; and (c) reporting to the Minister on progress made. The recognition of, and collaboration with RPL centres was not done due

to the lack of an enabling environment for them to operate and funding. The Department has evaluated the implementation of Phase 1.

As part of the RPL Coordination Policy review process following Phase 1, the Department conducted a study and engaged in extensive consultations with stakeholders, leading to a recommendation for the repeal of the RPL Coordination Policy. Instead, a new RPL Implementation Framework was proposed. In March 2023, the Minister officially communicated this recommendation through Government Notice No. 3216, inviting public comment. The recommendation was supported by stakeholders/ the public.

The Department has therefore developed the RPL Implementation Framework in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) System (the Implementation Framework) to simplify and institutionalise the coordination and implementation of RPL. With the final publication of the Implementation Framework, the Minister will repeal the RPL Coordination Policy (2016). It is envisaged that this Implementation Framework will create a more unified, coherent, and effective RPL policy environment that addresses the complexities of the current multi/dual-policy system and supports the national goals for recognition of prior learning.

This Implementation Framework is a testament to the extensive trajectory of RPL understanding and development, drawing inspiration and insights from a rich tapestry of international and local initiatives. Internationally, various stakeholders have ardently contributed to RPL's evolution through rigorous research, insightful conferences, and collaborative partnerships. Domestically, South Africa has witnessed dedicated efforts by researchers, educational institutions, government bodies, and industry partners to shape the landscape of RPL. This framework, positioned at the nexus of past achievements, current endeavours, and future aspirations, encapsulates the collective wisdom garnered from the dynamic interplay of RPL-related research, conferences, partnerships, and other initiatives. As we embark on this journey within the PSET system, the framework stands poised to seamlessly integrate lessons learned from the past, respond to the evolving present, and chart a course for the continued enhancement of RPL practices in the foreseeable future built on current practices.

1.2   Scope of the RPL Implementation Framework

The scope of this RPL Implementation Framework covers the entire PSET System. The framework applies broadly to:

- The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET);
- SAQA;
- The three Quality Councils (Council on Higher Education (CHE), Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and Umalusi);

- Education and training providers (eg. universities, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs); including private providers);
- Professional Bodies;
- Other government departments;
- Employers;
- Trade Unions, non- governmental organisations (NGOs) and social partners and community organisations; and
- The Individual.

1.3 Purpose of the RPL Implementation Framework

The Implementation Framework is designed with the primary objective of simplifying and institutionalising the coordination and implementation of RPL in the PSET System. Through the Framework, the Department seeks to provide an enabling environment for the further development and implementation of RPL across the PSET system. It aims to foster providers[1] (including RPL implementers) to embed RPL practices into organisational culture, policies and procedures.

The Implementation Framework aims to:

a. Ensure that the objectives of the NQF Act, 2008 (Act No. 67 of 2008) (the NQF Act) are realised. These are to:
   i. Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education and training and career paths; and
   ii. Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
b. Clarifies the forms of RPL that are applied for different purposes by different providers;
c. Support PSET institutions and other providers such as the QCTO Assessment Quality Partners, Trade Test Centres, Professional Bodies and employers to institutionalise RPL as a key component of their educational, training, assessment and recognition offerings, promoting inclusivity, flexibility, and responsiveness to the diverse needs of individuals; and
d. Provide for roles and functions of the strategic partners (the Department, SAQA, the three Quality Councils, other government departments) and providers.

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[1] In the context of this document 'Providers' are broadly defined in a life-long learning perspective as PSET institutions and other providers such as QCTO Assessment Quality Partners, Trade Test Centres, Professional Bodies and employers

1.4   Development Process

The development of the Implementation Framework followed a comprehensive and collaborative approach. A multi-phase process included conducting research and analysis to review international best practices, local contextual factors, and stakeholder perspectives to inform the Implementation Framework's design. Stakeholder consultation was conducted with diverse stakeholders, including the DHET, other government departments, education and training institutions (public and private), entities (SAQA, three Quality Councils, Universities South Africa), Professional Bodies, and employers to incorporate a broad range of perspectives.

1.5   Structure of the Implementation Framework

The Implementation Framework is organised into four sections, namely an introduction; the conceptual framework; the strategic intent; and the policy implementation strategy that includes a high-level implementation plan.

The introduction highlights the Implementation Framework's roots in a rich history of global and local RPL initiatives. It recognises that the Implementation Framework is positioned as a synthesis of past achievements, ongoing efforts, and future aspirations within the PSET system.

The Conceptual Framework outlines the core understanding of RPL, defining its South African context, detailing various forms, and establishing key principles. It serves as the foundational conceptualisation, reflecting the collective wisdom from international and local experiences, providing a comprehensive guide for RPL practices within PSET institutions.

Aligned with the vision for PSET, the section on Strategic Intent, emphasises the Implementation Framework's role in building a fair, equitable, and democratic South Africa. It formulates the vision statement, and discusses goals, strategic objectives, and policy actions, providing a roadmap that aligns with broader societal objectives and the 2014 White Paper for PSET.

The last section provides a high-level implementation plan that addresses coordination needs for sound policy implementation. It outlines key considerations for effective implementation.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptualising RPL

RPL in the South African education system is driven by three key imperatives - firstly, as a means of addressing historical inequalities and ensuring equitable access to learning transformation; secondly, to formally recognise experiential knowledge, skills and competencies within the frameworks of accreditation, recognition and lifelong learning; and thirdly, to integrate RPL seamlessly into the NQF for enhancing the system's flexibility, articulation capabilities, and the development of a national credit accumulation and transfer system.

RPL involves the formal recognition, assessment, and accreditation of an individual's prior learning experiences, regardless of the context it has been acquired. It acknowledges that learning is a continuous, lifelong process that takes place inside and outside formal educational settings. It also supports the concept of open learning[2] as contained in both the White Paper on Education (1995) and the White Paper on PSET (2014). The multi-contextual and multi-dimensional aspects of RPL in South Africa highlight the inclusivity and flexibility of the recognition process. This approach acknowledges and values the diverse ways in which individuals acquire knowledge and skills, promoting a more inclusive and holistic approach to education and skills development.

This conceptual framework seeks to delineate the key principles and considerations guiding the implementation of RPL within the broader context of PSET.

2.2 Forms of RPL

RPL in South Africa is implemented by specific providers, depending on its purpose/objective, as follows:

(a) **RPL for credits** is used to provide for the awarding of credits by a provider for:
  i. The purpose of completing a qualification when a learner changes study programmes or institutions; or
  ii. advanced standing/exemption from modules/course making up a qualification; or

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[2] Open learning is an approach which combines the principles of learner centredness, lifelong learning, flexibility of learning provision, the removal of barriers to access learning, the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the expectation that students can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems.

iii.   towards granting a full qualification (This option is extremely rare and if followed, needs to take place within a fully transparent and quality assured process, where all the evidence from the process is recorded).

(b)   **RPL for access**:

     i.   **into a learning programme/qualification** - provides an alternative access route into a programme/course of learning/qualification **by institutions** for those who do not meet the formal minimum requirements for admission. RPL for access applies to learning programmes offered by a registered/accredited education institution, skills development provider or workplace-based training provider.

    ii.   **into the External Integrated Summative Assessment** (EISA) of Occupational Qualifications – provides the evaluation and acknowledgement of the knowledge and skills by the **Assessment Quality Partner** (education institution or skills development provider) that a candidate has gained to enable access to the EISA.

   iii.   **to a trade test through Artisan RPL** (ARPL) – provides an active pathway to full Artisan Trade Occupational Qualifications registered on the NQF, linked to listed trades in all sectors of the economy. ARPL is applied at an accredited **Trade Test Centre** for the trade which is being applied for.

   iv.   **into Professional Designations** – provides an alternative access route to Professional Designations awarded by **Professional Bodies**.

    v.   **for recognition and promotion** in the workplaces (RPL for advancement) – provides an alternative access route to employment by an **employer** when a candidate does not have the requisite qualifications, skills or competencies for a specific job or occupation, and advancement within an organisation for the same reason.

2.3   Key Principles Underpinning the RPL Implementation Framework

The following principles underpin the RPL Implementation Framework:

(a)   **Equity and social Inclusion**: RPL within the South African context is deeply rooted in the principles of equity and social inclusion. It aims to address historical disparities in education, training and employment by acknowledging and validating the diverse skills, knowledge and competencies acquired by individuals, especially those from historically marginalised communities. The Implementation Framework ensures that RPL becomes a transformative tool for empowering previously disadvantaged groups, contributing to social cohesion and inclusivity;

(b)   **RPL by design**: Integrate RPL seamlessly into curriculum design, allowing for the recognition of diverse forms of learning. Ensure assessments align with RPL principles, promoting a flexible and inclusive education and training system. In the broader context is must also be seamlessly

integrated into assessment, recognition, appointment, qualifications and professional registration design;

(c) **Institutionalisation of RPL**: Embed RPL within the context of providers to create a cultural shift that recognises and values prior learning experiences. Institutionalisation ensures consistency and acceptance of RPL across various learning environments and providers, and also ensures that providers are adequately resourced to implement RPL;

(d) **Lifelong Learning**: Promote the concept of lifelong learning by positioning RPL as a key enabler for recognising knowledge, skills and competencies acquired throughout an individual's life. Encourage a mindset that values continuous learning and skills development;

(e) **Advocacy and Communication**: Develop robust advocacy and communication strategies to raise awareness about RPL benefits among individuals, providers, stakeholders and the public. Clear communication fosters understanding and acceptance of RPL processes;

(f) **Mobility of students and work seekers**: Facilitate the mobility of students and work seekers by recognising RPL-acquired qualifications and recognition. This enhances the transferability of skills, supporting educational, training, employment and career transitions;

(g) **Collaboration with stakeholders**: Establish collaborative partnerships with industry, government bodies, Professional Bodies, and community organisations. Collaboration ensures that RPL processes align with current industry needs, fostering mutual understanding and support;

(h) **Quality Assurance**: Implement stringent quality assurance measures to maintain the credibility and reliability of RPL. Adherence to national standards and continuous monitoring contribute to the integrity of recognised qualifications, competences and expertise.

(i) **Documentation and record keeping**: Develop comprehensive systems for documenting and storing RPL-related data, ensuring accuracy, confidentiality, and accessibility. Efficient record-keeping supports transparency and effective administration;

(j) **Training and Capacity Development**: Provide ongoing training programmes to/by providers for policy makers, decision makers, management, assessors, educators, and support staff to enhance their RPL understanding and expertise. Capacity development ensures that role players are equipped with the necessary skills to execute and support RPL processes effectively;

(k) **Continuous Review and Improvement**: Establish a framework for continuous evaluation and improvement of RPL implementation. Regular reviews, based on feedback and evolving educational and industry requirements, enable the Implementation Framework to adapt and remain effective over time; and

(l) **Openness:** DHET is committed to opening access to all RPL documents and materials produced using government funds and the funds of government's development partners. It also commits to opening access and credit accumulation for everyone in a structured and controlled environment.

2.4 The Legislative Mandate

This section outlines the international, continental, regional and local legislative and policy context relevant to RPL.

2.4.1 International, Continental and Regional Context

(a) RPL is a crucial principle that aligns with the United Nations Education 2030 Agenda, specifically with Goal 4, which aims to ensure access to inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. South Africa's commitment to the implementation and integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrates its dedication to fostering education that is accessible and beneficial to all its citizens.

(b) South Africa's ratification of the *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education* (Addis Convention) adopted in 2014 and its commitment to ratify the Global Convention on Qualifications concerning Higher Education, adopted by UNESCO in 2019, highlights the importance of recognising prior learning as a key element in promoting equitable access to higher education. The conventions' principles resonate with the core values of RPL, emphasising inclusivity, transparency, and the acknowledgment of diverse learning pathways for fostering lifelong learning opportunities.

(c) The principles embedded in the RPL Implementation Framework resonate with the principles adopted in the Regional Guidelines for RPL, 2022 (Southern African Development Community (SADC) RPL Guidelines), reinforcing the importance of inclusivity, fairness, and transparency in the assessment of prior learning. This alignment ensures that the implementation of RPL practices adheres to a unified set of principles within the SADC region, contributing to the advancement of educational inclusivity and workforce development across member states.

2.3.2 Legislative and Policy Context in South Africa

(a) The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 intends inter alia to redress imbalances of the past, and by implication enables RPL implementation. Section 29 of the Constitution guarantees the right of all South Africans to basic, adult basic and further education. The RPL Implementation Framework is designed to operationalise the principles of the Constitution and explicitly aims to contribute to the realisation of the right to education for all citizens.

(b) The National Development Plan - Vision 2030 requires South Africans to have access to education and training of the highest quality, leading to significantly improved learning outcomes. RPL provides a credible access route.

(c)   The NQF Act - This Act, is the enabling legislation for RPL. The Act assigns very specific RPL-related responsibilities to SAQA, and the Quality Councils. According to Section 13(1)(h)(iii), SAQA is mandated to develop policy and criteria for RPL, assessment, and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT). Section 27(h)(1) mandates the Quality Councils to develop and implement policy and criteria, taking into account the policy and criteria contemplated in section 13(1)(h)(iii) for assessment, RPL and Credit Accumulation and Transfer.

(d)   The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) emphasises the redress of imbalances generated through historical inequalities in provision of education and training among those sections of society who have suffered particular disadvantages. RPL is one mechanism to address these imbalances.

(e)   White Paper for Post-School Education and Training which was approved by Cabinet on 20 November 2013, states that RPL remains a key approach to redressing past injustices and recognising competence gained through practical workplace.

(f)   The Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) creates the environment for RPL to be implemented in higher education institutions. Evidenced by recognition of the need for redress, the provision of optimal opportunities for learning, promotion of values, and the promotion of the full realisation of the potential of every student and employee are reflected in the Act.

(g)   Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998) provides for an institutional framework for the implementation of national, sector and workplace strategies, to improve the skills of the South African workforce. This Act is explicit on the need for redress through education and training, to improve the employment prospects of persons previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination and to redress those disadvantages through training and education (Section 2(1)(e)).

(h)   Continuing Education and Training Act, 2006 (Act No. 16 of 2006). RPL is embedded in the principles such as "expansion of access to education and training to all youth and adults, especially those who have limited opportunities for structured learning, including students with disabilities; and diversification and transformation of institutions that promote the goals and objectives of a progressive socio- economic agenda".

(i)   The establishment of the Matriculation Board. The implementation of the provisions of Section 74 of the Higher Education Act (Act no. 101 of 1997) and the proposed abolition of the statutory status of the Committee of [University] Principals (CUP), the Matriculation Board (MB) and the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) has an impact on RPL. It was recommended to the Minister that those functions of the Matriculation Board that remain necessary to ensure alternative access to public and private higher education, be taken over by Umalusi, acting in

terms of existing provisions of the GENFETQA Act, 2001 (Act 58 of 2001) augmented as may be necessary by regulations to be promulgated under that Act, noting that the Joint Statutes (Chapters IV and V) and all their amendments will be replaced by national (DHET and SAQA) policies for RPL, CAT and articulation, where the counterpart CHE policies are aligned to those of the DHET and SAQA.

This Implementation Framework further recognises all other international protocols, conventions as well as South African legislation and policies not mentioned here, that promote RPL.

3. STRATEGIC INTENT

3.1 Vision Espoused in the Implementation Framework

This Implementation Framework espouses the vision of the White Paper for PSET and is aligned to its main policy objectives. These include a single, coordinated PSET system that:

- assists in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa;
- has expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision;
- has stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace; and
- is responsive to the needs of individual citizens, employers in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives.

Within the above context…

> The vision of the **RPL Implementation Framework in the PSET System** is that a coherent and aligned RPL environment is operational across South Africa

3.2 Strategic Objectives of the Implementation Framework

The Strategic Objectives of the Implementation Framework can be summarised as follows:

1. Create a simplified, aligned and enabling environment for RPL;
2. Demystify and build a general understanding of RPL;
3. Institutionalise RPL in the PSET system; and
4. Build the capacity of the broader PSET System to deploy RPL across the PSET system.

To realise the vision, goals and outcomes of the Implementation Framework, the above are contained in four Strategic Objectives. Each Strategic Objective includes actions and activities. In the Implementation Plan indicators and timeframes are associated with each strategic objective, outcome and output. However, this Implementation Framework recognises that these actions are not exhaustive; and some role-players have already mechanisms in place to implement RPL, that this Implementation Framework will build on.

3.2.1 Strategic Objective 1: Create a Simplified, Aligned and Enabling Environment for RPL

This Strategic Objective aims to create a simplified, aligned and enabling environment for RPL within the PSET system to ensure the effective implementation of RPL. These include:

- **Legal and regulatory framework:** Align PSET and relevant legislation and develop and enforce regulations that support RPL implementation, ensuring consistency and compliance across the PSET system;

- **RPL policy environment:** Establish a single, coherent, transparent and aligned RPL Policy environment;

- **RPL coordination through collaboration:** Promote collaboration between relevant government departments, entities, educational institutions, other providers, industry stakeholders, and other key players to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to RPL policies and its implementation. This also necessitates a robust evaluation of current national RPL policies to simplify and align the policy environment. It includes directives, policies, norms, standards and guidelines;

- **Coordination mechanisms:** The Implementation Framework provides for national structures and mechanisms to foster the effective implementation of RPL policies in PSET providers/institutions, ensuring a supportive ecosystem that maximises the benefits of RPL; and

- **Funding and resourcing**: Adequate resourcing is a cornerstone for creating an enabling environment. This means that departments, entities and providers/institutions must be empowered to deploy sustainable funding strategies.

Implementing Strategic Objective 1:

Creating a simplified, aligned and enabling environment for RPL within the PSET system requires deliberate actions to ensure coherence, fairness, and support. Below are key actions that will be taken to achieve this goal.

(a) Align PSET and relevant legislation, and develop and enforce regulations that support RPL implementation, ensuring consistency and compliance across the PSET system

Action: Align PSET and relevant legislation.

- Identify and analyse PSET and legislation relevant to RPL and make, where necessary recommendations for amendments;

- Identify and analyse existing Regulations relevant to RPL and make, where necessary recommendations for amendments;

- Identify gaps for the development of new Regulations to operationalise RPL; and

- Work with the Departments of Science and Innovation (DSI), Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and Cooperative Governance (DCoG); the National School of Government (NSG) and relevant entities such as Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority (PSETA) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) to build an enabling legislative and regulative RPL environment in the Public Sector.

(b) Establish a single, coherent, clear and aligned RPL Policy environment

The RPL policy environment includes: directives, policies, norms, standards and guidelines. The importance of the establishment of a single, coherent, transparent and aligned policy environment will enable the understanding of RPL and also mitigate the successful implementation of all forms of RPL.

Action: Align, simplify and where necessary develop comprehensive RPL Policies and Guidelines.

- Do an environmental scan of RPL and related policies in the PSET system to identify relevant RPL directives and applications, as well as identify gaps and duplications in the policy environment;
- Create detailed and accessible policies and guidelines outlining the purpose, principles, and procedures of RPL within the PSET system;
- Work with the DSI, DPSA and DCoG; the NSG and relevant entities to build an enabling RPL policy environment in the Public Sector;
- Map the RPL legislative and policy environment and publish the map for public consumption; and
- Clearly define for each form of RPL eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, assessment methodologies, and the appeals process to ensure transparency and fairness.

Action: Align the Policy Environment with National and Industry Standards.

- Ensure that the RPL policy environment is aligned with the NQF and its sub-frameworks, other national education and training frameworks, quality assurance standards, and relevant industry requirements; and
- Regularly review and update policies to reflect changes in accreditation standards, industry practices, and education and training best practices.

(c) Build Capacity in understanding the legislative and policy environment (See actions under Strategic Objective 4 - Implementing Strategic Objective 4).

Capacity building in understanding the legislative and policy environment is essential and has therefore been upfronted as part of Strategic Objective 4.

(d) Foster Collaboration and Continuous Improvement

Promote collaboration between relevant government departments, entities, educational institutions, other providers, industry stakeholders, and other key players to ensure a holistic and coordinated approach to RPL policies and its implementation.

Action: Engage Stakeholders in the RPL Process.

- As already highlighted above, it is essential to work with the DSI, DPSA and DCoG; the NSG and relevant entities to build an enabling RPL policy environment in the Public Sector;
- Establish advisory committees or forums at different provider levels where input from external stakeholders can be gathered to enhance the relevance of RPL and RPL assessments.

Action: Implement Regular Review and Evaluation Mechanisms.

- Set up a system for regular reviews and evaluations of the RPL implementation framework; and
- Collect feedback from stakeholders to identify areas for improvement and to address any emerging challenges.

Action: Encourage Research and Development in RPL.

- Support and promote research initiatives related to RPL within the PSET system; and
- Invest in studies and evaluations that assess the impact of RPL on student success, career advancement, and overall educational and training outcomes.

(e) Establishment of national structures and mechanisms

According to the NQF Act (2008) as amended, relevant Departments, SAQA and the Quality Councils must seek to achieve the objectives of the NQF by inter alia developing, fostering and maintaining an integrated and transparent national mechanism for the recognition of learning achievements, including RPL. This national mechanism provides for national structures and mechanisms to foster the effective implementation of RPL policies by RPL providers, ensuring a supportive ecosystem that maximises the benefits of RPL. However, it is not envisaged that an overarching national coordination mechanism/committee for RPL would be established. The implementation of RPL will be coordinated through relevant provider specific mechanisms where necessary.

To this extent the Inter-Departmental Task Team on RPL in the Public Sector has been established that creates a collaborative and consultative platform between multiple stakeholders to ensure an enabling environment for RPL in the public sector.

Other coordination mechanisms will be established on a needs' basis.

According to the NQF Act, SAQA must provide leadership in and coordinate RPL in the country.

Action: SAQA will provide leadership in and coordinate RPL in the country by:

- Aligning the National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL with the policies of Quality Councils and to other education and training policies;
- Ensuring that there is no differentiation on the basis of how learning was achieved;
- Reviewing the RPL statement in all qualifications to ensure that RPL can effectively be applied in all qualifications;
- Providing advice, guidance and support to the implementation of RPL;
- Advising the Minister about implementation and possible amendments to legislation or the publication of regulations; and
- Linking relevant data on RPL, including learning achievements via RPL, in a National NQF Records Database (NNRD).

(f) Empower departments, entities, and providers in specific, to deploy integrated funding strategies for RPL

It is well-known that adequate resourcing is the cornerstone for creating an enabling environment. This include, but is not limited to, empowering departments, entities, and providers in specific, to deploy integrated funding strategies for robust RPL assessment mechanisms, capacity-building initiatives, and scalability and sustainability of RPL practices, ultimately fostering a dynamic and inclusive learning ecosystem.

Action: Deploy integrated funding strategies for RPL at provider level.

- Develop sustainable funding strategies and provide resources by departments, entities and providers to ensure different forms of RPL implementation.

By implementing these actions, the RPL Implementation Framework can create a positive environment where RPL is integrated seamlessly into the education and training system, ensuring fairness, transparency, and continuous improvement in the RPL process within the PSET system.

3.2.2 Strategic Objective 2: Demystify and Build a General Understanding of RPL

The domain of RPL is aligned to the main elements of the South African national policy discourse since 1994, with a specific focus of achieving transformation; accreditation; lifelong learning; and complying with the NQF and its sub-frameworks. Although there are significant pioneers and leaders in this field, as well as brilliant research, development and examples of RPL, in general RPL is misunderstood in the public domain. Engagements in RPL are mainly at theoretical levels and not only the 'man in the street', but also several providers are uninformed about what RPL is, what it befits are and how it is applied. Most people see it only as alternative access to formal qualifications.

Therefore, all stakeholders must make concerted efforts to build an RPL regime that is generally understood, supported and integrated into the PSET system. This includes:

- **Strategic communication and information dissemination:** Develop and implement targeted communication strategies to raise awareness and build understanding about RPL among diverse stakeholders within the PSET system;
- **Information resources development and dissemination:** Creation of informative resources at various levels such as brochures, pamphlets, and online resources, explaining the concept of RPL, the forms of RPL, its benefits, and the procedures involved;
- **Professional development of practitioners:** Enable comprehensive professional development programmes for practitioners, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively implement RPL;
- **Collaborative partnerships and stakeholder engagement:** Foster collaborative partnerships between departments, entities, PSET providers, professional bodies, industry stakeholders, and community organisations to collectively enhance the understanding and implementation of RPL. Engage in regular consultations and feedback sessions to address concerns, gather insights, and refine RPL policies and practices. By involving diverse stakeholders in the development and implementation of RPL initiatives, the Implementation Framework encourages a shared understanding, aligning the interests of policy makers, providers, educators, employers, and students to create a supportive and informed environment for RPL implementation.; and
- **Referatory[3] of RPL Documents and Practices:** Build a referatory and where needed a repository of documents, case studies and research studies in the application of RPL by diverse

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[3] A referatory is a web application system (also known as a database-driven website) that provides information such as the name and description, reviews, and hyperlinks (metadata) to resources or learning objects in different repositories, databases and websites. The repository provides the actual resource files, while the referatory is pointing at the resources.

providers. This will enable RPL documents and practices to be shared, and learning materials to be made available os Open Educational Resources (OER).

Implementing Strategic Objective 2:

To demystify and build a general understanding of RPL within the PSET system, it is essential to take actions that promote awareness, clarity, and learning recognition. Below are key actions required to achieve the objective of demystifying and building a general understanding of RPL.

(a) Develop and implement targeted communication strategies

Action: Develop, implement, and monitor the implementation of targeted communication strategies.

- Emanating from the different forms of RPL, identify strategic stakeholders and provider groups and develop targeted Communication Strategies to raise awareness and build understanding about RPL among diverse stakeholders within the PSET system. This includes to conduct workshops, webinars, and seminars to engage departments, policy makers, educators, students, employers, and entities in discussions that demystify RPL, and foster a general, broad and accurate understanding of RPL; and
- SAQA must monitor the implementation of these Communication Strategies and make strategic recommendation to make the Communication Strategies more effective.

Action: Establish Clear Communication Channels at various levels.

- Set up dedicated communication channels, such as a helpline, email support, or in-person consultations, to address queries and concerns related to RPL;
- Encourage an open discourse on RPL in the public domain that seeks to provide clarification on RPL matters, and promoting a supportive environment; and
- Engage Stakeholders in RPL legislation and the policy environment.

(b) Develop and disseminate comprehensive information resources at various levels

Action: Create User-Friendly Information Resources and Frequently Asked Questions.

- Develop easy-to-understand information resources and frequently asked questions (FAQs) that explain the concept of RPL, its purpose, the forms of RPL, and the steps involved in each of the processes depending on the form of RPL. These resources should be written in clear and accessible language, avoiding theoretical jargon, and should be made available in various formats to cater for diverse audiences;
- Publish information resources widely; and
- Encourage public debate on RPL issues.

Action: Establish an Information Website or Portal (linked to the referatory).

- Create a dedicated website or online portal that serves as a centralised hub for RPL information dissemination within the PSET system; and
- Include sections that cover the basics of RPL, forms of RPL, benefits, procedures, and success stories to illustrate the real-world impact of RPL.

(c) Enable comprehensive professional development programmes for RPL practitioners

Universities and the NSG are strategically placed to enable comprehensive professional development programmes for different practitioners, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage and implement RPL (See actions under Strategic Objective 4 - Implementing Strategic Objective 4).

(d) Engage stakeholders through effective and continuous communication

Action: Engage diverse stakeholder in the development and implementation of RPL initiatives.

- Engage in regular consultations and feedback sessions to address concerns, gather insights, and refine RPL policies and practices;
- Involve diverse stakeholders in the development and implementation of RPL initiatives; and
- Encourage a shared understanding, aligning the interests of policy makers, providers, educators, employers, and students to create a supportive and informed environment for RPL implementation.

Action: Conduct Public Awareness Campaigns and Workshops.

- Continuously organise seminars, conferences, workshops, webinars, and awareness campaigns to disseminate information about RPL to different stakeholders to demystify RPL and build an understanding on the application of RPL in different forms; and
- Utilise various communication channels, such as social media, newsletters, and events, to promote these awareness campaigns and reach a wider audience.

(e) Foster collaborative partnerships between departments, entities, PSET providers, industry stakeholders and community organisations to collectively enhance the understanding and implementation of RPL

Action: Formalise broader government partnerships in RPL.

- Formalise government partnerships between various departments such as the Department of Basic Education (DBE), DHET, DSI, DPSA, DCoG, NSG and others where RPL is required and is relevant for implmentation;
- Formalise partnership between the DHET, DPSA, SAQA and NSG on RPL in the Public Service for improving qualifications and for recruitment and promotion;
- Formalise partnership between SAQA and the DSI on RPL for professionalisation of indigenous knowledge workers;
- Formalise partnership between DCoG, NSG, PSETA and SALGA on RPL for elected municipality officials;
- Formalise partnerships with SAQA and the 3 Quality Councils on RPL requirements for credits and access, for qualification requirements, and the implementation of RPL within the three NQF sub-frameworks; and
- Institutionalise the Matriculation Board to provide alternative access into Higher Education Programmes.

Action: Formalise partnerships with Professional Bodies in RPL.

- Formalise partnerships between Quality Councils (CHE and QCTO), the DHET and Professional Bodies in providing an alternative access route to Professional Designations awarded by Professional Bodies through RPL.

Action: Formalise institutional partnerships to effectively implement RPL for access and for credits across all NQF sub-frameworks.

- Formalise institutional partnerships with other providers, professional bodies, industry stakeholders and community organisations to effectively implement RPL.

(f) Build an RPL referatory and where needed repositories of documents, case studies and research studies in the application of RPL by diverse providers

Action: Build an RPL Referatory that enables RPL documents, materials and practices to be shared.

- Build an RPL Referatory (web application system/database-driven website) that provides information such as the name and description, reviews, and hyperlinks (metadata) to

documents, materials, practices, research articles (in the public domain), learning resources or learning objects in different repositories, databases and websites.

Action: Consider the building of relevant RPL Repositories, linked to the RPL Referatory.

- Conduct a survey of RPL repositories, including documents, case studies, information materials and training materials in the country;
- Establish links to the RPL Referatory; and
- Where necessary, develop and maintain relevant repositories.

Action: Promote openness through the adoption of open licensing frameworks for RPL documents and materials.

- All RPL documents and materials produced with Government funds – including research resources and teaching and learning resources – will be released under a suitable Open Licence, to facilitate their use, electronic sharing, and adaptation by others. This will include resources of all media types, including print/text, audio, video, and computer-based multimedia;
- The DHET will adopt, as a default licence for all products produced through government funding, an attribution licence. Likewise, it will encourage all development agencies and foundations operating in the South African PSET system to adopt a similar licence for all materials produced with development aid. In any cases where another licence is not explicitly mentioned, this default licence will be applied to any materials produced with government funds;
- Authors of works produced with government funds will be entitled to apply additional licence restrictions from example the Creative Commons licence framework if desired, but will then need to make this explicit by inserting chosen licence in materials they have developed;
- Where a case can be made for commercial exploitation of resources, authors or institutions will be entitled to insert a traditional, All-Rights Reserved Copyright licence, but only after submission of a justification for this restriction have been supplied to the specific agency funding the work and approval having been granted for this in writing by the agency in question; and
- Responsibility will reside with authors of works to ensure that any third-party materials incorporated in resources produced with government funds do not breach any relevant copyright laws, either nationally or globally.

By implementing these actions, the RPL Implementation Framework can effectively demystify and build a general understanding of RPL within the PSET system, fostering a culture of transparency, accessibility, and support for individuals seeking recognition for their prior learning experiences.

3.2.3 Strategic Objective 3: Institutionalise RPL in the PSET System

RPL is implemented at provider/institutional level through different providers (as defined in this Implementation Framework). These are PSET institutions and other providers such as QCTO Assessment Quality Partners, Trade Test Centres, Professional Bodies, and employers. Therefore, each provider must ensure that RPL is integrated into their programme offerings and recognition practices. RPL cannot take place outside the context of the provider that supports the specific form of RPL. This include:

- **Criteria and Guidelines:** National Criteria and Guidelines will be developed for different forms of RPL to provide guidance on the implementation of RPL.

- **Supporting materials/resources and toolkits:** Different providers can be supported by supporting materials and toolkits that can be developed nationally (by a Department, SAQA or the Quality Councils) or collaboratively by a Department, SAQA, Quality Councils or providers/institutions.

- **Policy integration and institutional alignment:** Ensure the institutionalisation of RPL by aligning institutional policies and strategic plans with national RPL policies within broader education and training objectives; and embedding them within the governance and implementation structures of PSET provider/institutions. This involves developing and implementing provider/institutional policies that seamlessly integrate RPL into existing frameworks, curriculum design, assessment regimes and quality assurance mechanisms. By promoting a cohesive alignment between RPL and provider/institutional goals, the Implementation Framework promotes sustainability by ensuring that RPL is properly resourced and funded within the provider/institution and is an integral and enduring part of every provider/institution in the PSET system.

- **RPL must reflect the general principles of assessment:** RPL principles of assessment remains the same as for any other form of assessment and include fairness, access, redress and equality, transparency, consultation, professionalism, recourse, consistency and credibility.

- **Quality assurance and continuous improvement mechanisms:** By fostering a culture of continuous improvement, the framework encourages providers/institutions to adapt RPL practices based on data-driven insights and stakeholder feedback, promoting sustainability by evolving and refining the RPL system in response to changing educational and industry needs. Furthermore, Establish robust quality assurance mechanisms for RPL practices within PSET institutions. This involves regular audits, evaluations, and feedback loops to assess the effectiveness of RPL processes, identify areas for improvement, and ensure adherence to established standards.

- **Training and professional development:** Prioritise comprehensive training programmes and continuous professional development opportunities for providers. This training should cover evolving RPL methodologies, assessment strategies, and updates in relevant legislation. By investing in the ongoing capacity-building of the workforce, the PSET system ensures that educators are well-equipped to adapt to changing educational landscapes, sustainably implement RPL practices, and maintain the quality and consistency of assessments over time.

Implementing Strategic Objective 3

Creating sustainable RPL Implementation within the PSET system requires actions that institutionalise RPL, ensuring its long-term integration and effectiveness. Special attention must be given to RPL assessment practices.

Below are actions to achieve the goal of developing sustainable RPL in the PSET system.

(a) Develop National Criteria and Guidelines for RPL Implementation

Action: For each specific form of RPL, develop National Criteria and Guidelines for RPL Implementation

- Produce a Conceptual Framework for the different forms of RPL and its application in the education and training system;
- Work with the DBE, all implementation branches in the DHET, and other Departments to outline the specific needs of each sector for National Criteria and Guidelines;
- Proliferate National Criteria and Guidelines as a minimum for each form of RPL and for specific sectors where necessary or where they do not exist;
- Develop national criteria and guidelines for RPL assessment related to each for of RPL/sector;
- In consultation with stakeholders and in collaboration with SAQA and the Quality Councils, develop for each form of RPL/sector National Criteria and Guidelines to provide guidance on the implementation of RPL. These criteria and guidelines will be collaboratively developed and nationally published.
- Provider/institutions can apply and adapt the Criteria and Guidelines for their own use in the implementation of RPL.

(b) Develop supporting materials/resources and toolkits

Action: For each specific form of RPL, where appropriate, source/develop supporting materials/resources and toolkits.

- For each specific form or provider type of RPL/sector, supporting materials/resources and toolkits can be developed to support providers and to maintain standards and to ensure equal implementation of RPL;
- All supporting materials/resources and toolkits will be published under an Open Licence for free access by providers; and
- All supporting materials/resources and toolkits will be available in identified repositories and accessible through the RPL Referatory.

(c) Institutionalise RPL within Organisational Structures

Action: Integrate national RPL policies into and align them with provider/institutional policies and strategic plans.

- Incorporate national RPL policies and objectives into the policies and strategic plans of providers/institutions; and
- Align RPL with the mission and vision of a provider/institution, emphasising its role in promoting inclusivity, flexibility, and learner-centered education and training.

Action: Establish dedicated RPL Units or Departments in providers/institutions

- Where appropriate create specialised units or departments within a provide/institution that are responsible for overseeing and managing the RPL process of the provider/institution and ensure alignment with national legislation, policies, criteria and guidelines.
- Designate RPL coordinators or managers who can foster collaboration between stakeholders, for example in academic institutions collaborate with academic departments, administrative staff, and external stakeholders to ensure the smooth operation of RPL initiatives.

(d) Develop Sustainable Funding Mechanisms

Action: Develop a multi-pronged and sustainable funding mechanism within each provider/institution.

- Provide guidance to providers/institutions on the development of multi-pronged and sustainable funding mechanisms within their current allocations/funding;
- Advocate for and secure sustainable funding sources to support the ongoing implementation of RPL programmes and services within providers/institutions; and

- Explore partnerships with government agencies, industry partners, and grant opportunities to ensure a stable financial foundation for RPL activities.

Action: Explore RPL Fee Structures and Revenue Models for providers/institutions

- SAQA and the Quality Councils must provide leadership and guidance to providers to RPL fee structures and revenue models;
- Consider developing fee structures or revenue-sharing models that allow the institution to recoup some costs associated with RPL implementation; and
- Ensure that any RPL related fees collected from students/applicants are reasonable, transparent, and do not create barriers for individuals seeking recognition for their prior learning.

(e) Deploy continuous RPL improvement mechanisms within providers/institutions

Action: Providers/institutions must adopt and adapt RPL practices based on data-driven insights and stakeholder feedback.

- The Department, SAQA and the Quality Councils must provide leadership in the collection of data and stakeholder feedback to assist providers/institutions to make informed decisions about RPL implementation;
- Encourage the sharing of practices and case studies on the RPL Referatory and publish lessons learnt;
- Assist provider/institutions to integrate RPL into their teaching and learning offerings and not to handle it as an alternative or second best to traditional offerings; and
- Assist provider/institutions in continuously improve RPL practices and implementation.

Action: Participate in Research and Knowledge Sharing.

- Encourage and support research initiatives that assess the impact and effectiveness of RPL within the PSET system; and
- Share research findings, best practices, and success stories to contribute to the broader knowledge base on RPL, both nationally and internationally.

Action: Foster Collaboration with Industry and Accreditation Bodies.

- Cultivate partnerships with industry stakeholders to ensure that RPL implementation and in specific RPL assessments are aligned with industry standards and expectations; and
- Collaborate with quality assurance and accreditation bodies to maintain the credibility and recognition of RPL within the broader educational landscape.

Action: Deploy cost-effective RPL Infrastructure.

- Design and implement cost-effective technology solutions at national and provider levels to manage RPL processes, reducing administrative overhead and making RPL financially sustainable; and
- Regularly assess the cost-effectiveness of RPL infrastructure and adjust as needed to optimise resources.

Action: Invest in technology for RPL management.

- Investigate the development and implementation of shared user-friendly and efficient online platform/s for different forms of RPL (where appropriate);
- Providers to implement their own user-friendly and efficient online platform for RPL application submissions, document uploads, and communication;
- Utilise technology to streamline the administrative aspects of RPL, reducing processing times and enhancing the overall experience for candidates and assessors; and
- Invest in RPL online assessment systems (where appropriate) to standardise, streamline and fast track assessment of RPL.

Action: Offer RPL Support Services to individuals.

- Establish a dedicated support team to assist individuals with information on RPL, guiding them through the application and assessment processes, and provide support during their RPL journey within providers/institutions;
- Develop a collection of RPL information, resources and materials for the use by individual RPL candidates and the public such as checklists, templates, and guidance documents to help candidates compile evidence and navigate the RPL process successfully; and
- Provide one-on-one support sessions or group workshops to address specific concerns and build confidence in navigating the RPL process.

Action: Integrate RPL into Academic Advisory Services.

- Train academic advisors to incorporate discussions about RPL into their advising sessions with students; and
- This integration can help students proactively consider RPL as part of their academic planning and career development.

Action: Engage in Public Awareness Campaigns at provider/institutional level.

- Launch public awareness campaigns for providers/institutions to inform potential candidates, employers, and the community about the benefits and processes of RPL; and
- Advocate the value of RPL in workforce development, career advancement, and lifelong learning, fostering a positive perception of RPL within the wider community.

Action: Create Awareness Programmes for RPL Support Services.

- Launch awareness campaigns to inform RPL candidates, students, educators, and staff about the availability of support services for RPL; and
- Clearly communicate how individuals can access these services, emphasising their role in facilitating a smooth and supportive RPL experience.

Action: Leverage Peer-to-Peer Networks.

- Encourage students who have successfully undergone the RPL process to share their experiences through testimonials or as mentors to their peers; and
- Peer-to-peer communication can help demystify RPL by providing real-world examples and relatable narratives.

By implementing these actions, the RPL Implementation Framework can contribute to the development of a sustainable RPL system within the PSET environment, ensuring that recognition of prior learning becomes an integral and enduring part of the institution's education and training offerings.
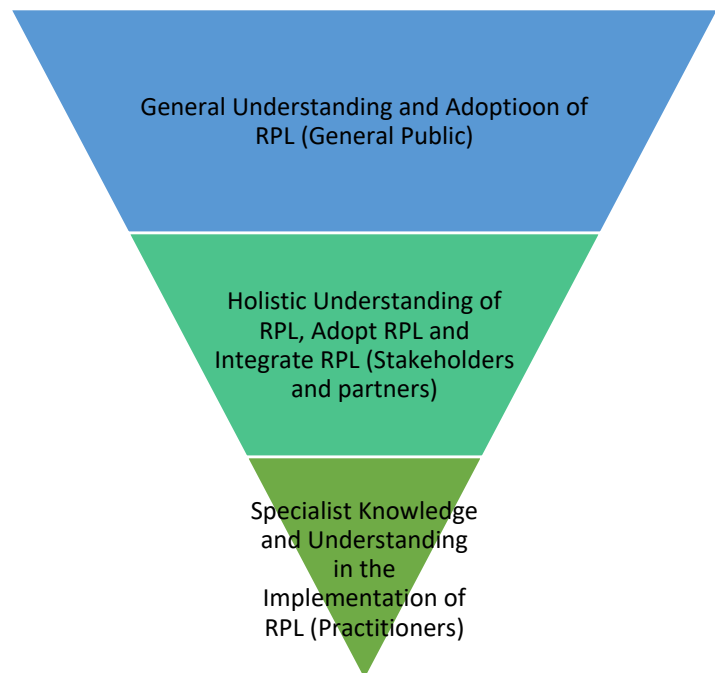
3.2.4 Strategic Objective 4: Build the capacity of the broader PSET System to deploy RPL across the PSET System.

For expansive implementation as directed by this Implementation Framework, capacity of the entire education and training system at different levels must be built.

Capacity building in RPL manifests at 3 levels, viz.:

- the general public in the understanding and adoption of RPL (for all forms of RPL);
- stakeholders and partners to have a holistic understanding of RPL, adopt RPL and integrate RPL as a viable option towards credits and for access; and
- practitioners to have specialist knowledge and understanding in the implementation of RPL.

The diagram illustrates the relative number of people within the three levels of capacity in the system:

General Understanding and Adoptioon of RPL (General Public)

Holistic Understanding of RPL, Adopt RPL and Integrate RPL (Stakeholders and partners)

Specialist Knowledge and Understanding in the Implementation of RPL (Practitioners)

Implementing Strategic Objective 4:

Capacity building in RPL is an integral part of each of the three Strategic Objectives above. Below are actions to build the capacity of the education and training system in RPL.

(a) Build capacity in the general understanding and adoption of RPL (Strategic Objective 2)

Strategic Objective 2: Demystifying and build a general understanding of RPL - covers in detail the building of capacity of the general public in the covers in detail the understanding and adoption of RPL for access into learning programmes/qualifications, EISA, trade tests, professional designations and for recruitment and promotion; as well as for credits within and towards qualifications (all forms of RPL).

(b) Build the capacity of stakeholders and partners in the understanding, adoption and integration of RPL

Action: Identify different stakeholder and devise a national plan for stakeholder engagement.

- Develop and implement a national capacity building plan for stakeholders;
- Make use of different media to continuously alert stakeholders of RPL options and feasibility; and
- Monitor stakeholder RPL understanding, adoption and integration.

Action: Build capacity of relevant stakeholders and partners in understanding the legislative and policy environment of RPL.

- Prioritise in the national capacity building plan for stakeholders the capacity in the understanding of the legislative and policy environment of RPL; and
- Conduct training on national legislation and RPL Policies.

(c) Build capacity of practitioners to have specialist knowledge and understanding in the implementation of RPL

Action: Professionalise RPL Practitioners.

- Develop a professional career pathway for RPL practitioners; and
- Professionalise the RPL profession through registering professional designations for RPL practitioners.

Action: Enable comprehensive professional development programmes for RPL practitioners (depending on the level and sector).

- Develop professional development programmes for RPL practitioners;
- Conduct training on national legislation and RPL Policies;
- Provide comprehensive training to staff, educators, and assessors on the established RPL policies and procedures; and
- Emphasise the importance of consistency, fairness, and adherence to policies throughout RPL assessment processes.

Action: Prioritise comprehensive training programmes and continuous professional development opportunities for RPL practitioners in various forms of RPL (providers).

- Enable comprehensive professional development programmes for practitioners, equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies to effectively implement RPL. This

includes training sessions on recognising diverse learning experiences, conducting fair and transparent assessments, and providing guidance to students. navigating RPL pathways. By empowering educators and assessors with a deep understanding of RPL principles, the system can ensure consistent and equitable application across various disciplines and providers;

- Universities must develop professional development opportunities in the form of qualifications for RPL practitioners that clearly address different forms of RPL, as well as leadership, management and implementation of RPL;
- Provide targeted training opportunities and resources;
- Develop RPL Training Modules;
- Integrate RPL training modules into orientation programmes and professional development programmes for both students and staff covering inter alia the fundamentals of RPL, guidance on assembling evidence (Portfolio of Evidence), and strategies for effective communication during the assessment process; and
- SAQA must monitor the availability and professional development of RPL practitioners in the country.

Action: Provide ongoing professional development for staff within provider/institutions.

- Offer training and professional development opportunities for managers, educators, administrators, and support staff to enhance their understanding of RPL principles and practices; and
- Ensure that staff members are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to effectively support and assess candidates through the RPL process.

Action: Develop professional development opportunities for RPL practitioners in in public sector.

- The NSG must develop professional development opportunities in the form of qualifications for RPL practitioners in in public sector. This includes leadership, management and implementation of RPL in the public sector; and
- Departments must make resources available to develop the general understanding of RPL in the public sector.

4.   IMPLEMENTATION

Following the publication of the Implementation Framework, the Department, PSET institutions, other strategic partners and providers of RPL will ensure its effective resourcing and implementation.

4.1   National Coordination

The Department, SAQA and the Quality Councils will play pivotal roles in providing national coordination.

SAQA is responsible for the national coordination of RPL and as already mentioned must:

- Align the National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL with the policies of Quality Councils and to other education and training policies;
- Provide leadership to the implementation of RPL policies;
- Coordinate RPL in the country so that there is no differentiation on the basis of how the learning was achieved;
- Provide advice, guidance and support to the implementation of RPL; and
- Receive relevant data on RPL, including learning achievements via RPL, for uploading onto the NNRD.

SAQA will serve as a facilitator for this Implementation Framework that outlines overarching principles and standards for RPL implementation, ensuring consistency and alignment with broader education and training objectives. The Department, SAQA and the Quality Councils, in turn, will facilitate collaboration, share best practices, establish quality assurance mechanisms and facilitate communication channels among providers/institutions. This collaborative approach allows the Department, SAQA and the Quality Councils to provide necessary leadership, support and guidance, allowing institutions the flexibility to innovate and adapt RPL processes according to their unique educational landscapes. Through such collaborative efforts, a harmonious balance can be struck, ensuring national coordination without impinging on the dynamic role of institutions in RPL implementation.

4.2   Institutional/Provider Coordination

This implementation Framework directs that the responsibility for RPL should primarily rest with providers and institutions rather than establishing dedicated RPL coordination mechanisms, as some policy advocates may suggest. By entrusting providers/institutions with the responsibility, there is an opportunity for tailored, context-specific implementation that aligns with the unique needs and characteristics of each educational setting, encouraging a more responsive and effective RPL system. This approach ensures a decentralised, agile, and learner-centred RPL framework, steering clear of unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles and promoting a more inclusive and adaptable process for validating prior learning experiences.

4.3   Funding Strategies

This Implementation Framework recognises that although RPL has many benefits, cost can be a barrier to its widespread implementation. This Implementation Framework aims to strengthen the financial resilience of RPL implementation, promoting inclusivity and minimising financial barriers for individuals seeking to validate their prior learning experiences. By expanding the funding base beyond existing allocations and student fees, a sustainable funding model for RPL implementation must be developed by providers. This involves exploring a combination of public and private partnerships, existing direct funding allocations, government grants and industry sponsorships.

4.4   Advocacy, Communication and Dissemination of the Implementation Framework

An Advocacy, Communication and Dissemination Plan will be developed by the Department, SAQA and the Quality Councils. This Plan will serve as a strategic blueprint aimed at effectively communicating the objectives, benefits, and processes associated with the RPL Implementation Framework. The primary purpose of this plan will be to create widespread awareness and understanding of the RPL Implementation Framework among key stakeholders, including managers, students, educators, employers, policymakers, and the broader community. By leveraging various communication channels, such as online platforms, workshops, and media outreach, the plan will aim to foster a supportive environment that encourages participation in RPL processes, ultimately enhancing access to higher education and promoting lifelong learning.

Furthermore, the plan will endeavour to establish a robust feedback mechanism to engage stakeholders in ongoing dialogue, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness to evolving needs. By outlining targeted advocacy campaigns, the plan will seek to address potential misconceptions, alleviate concerns, and emphasise the transformative impact of RPL on educational inclusivity and workforce development. Through a well-coordinated dissemination strategy, the plan will reach diverse audiences, facilitating the seamless integration of RPL within the PSET system and reinforcing its role as a catalyst for educational equity and societal advancement.

4.5   High-Level Implementation Plan

The final Implementation Framework will include a High-Level Implementation Plan that provides a comprehensive and detailed approach to implementing the Implementation Framework, considering the involvement and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including employers, throughout the short-term, medium-term, and long-term phases. Once consultations and the public comment process have been concluded, the final Implementation Framework will be developed with a high-level implementation plan attached.

4.6   Roles and Responsibilities

This Implementation Strategy will be used by multiple providers, partners and stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities of primary stakeholders include:

Government, through Ministries and departments, shall inter alia:

i.   Provide the main Implementation Framework for RPL for all forms and at different levels;

ii.   Drive the strategic agenda and determines how RPL is integrated into the education and training system;

iii.   Ensure that (the right) to RPL is integrated into policy and legal frameworks, linking to education and labour market policies at macro and meso level, and qualification frameworks;

iv.   Determine (in collaboration with other stakeholders) learning pathways and creates favourable conditions for lifelong learning;

v.   Determine whether the RPL system implementation is favourable (through national level provider/institutions) or decentralised (through local provider/institutions); and

vi.   Establish a sustainable funding model for RPL in the country.

Department of Higher Education and Training shall:

i.   Oversee the development and implementation of simplified, aligned and coherent national RPL policies, norms, standards and guidelines across the system;

ii.   Fund and support specific national awareness campaigns;

iii.   Provide resources for the development and maintenance of the RPL referatory and information portal;

iv.   Oversee the integration of RPL into the NQF and its sub-frameworks;

v.   In collaboration with SAQA, establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of RPL implementation;

vi.   Facilitate the institutionalisation of RPL within PSET institutions; and

vii.   Engage different departments such as DSI (RPL for indigenous knowledge systems); DBE (RPL in basic education); DPSA and the NSG (RPL for the public service); DCoG and the NSG (RPL for elected officials) and others.

SAQA shall:

i.   Collaborate with Departments, Quality Councils and other stakeholders in developing RPL policy and guidelines;

ii.   Ensure alignment of RPL with the NQF;

iii.   Monitor and evaluate the quality of RPL processes and outcomes;

iv.   Provide guidance on integrating RPL into the NQF;

v.   Receive RPL data from Quality Councils for recording on the NNRD;

vi.   Co-ordinate the alignment of NQF Sub-Framework policies on RPL;

vii.   Drive the inclusion of RPL in relevant qualifications and learning programmes; and

viii.   Report to the Minister on the implementation of RPL, based on reports from the Quality Councils on their areas of responsibility regarding RPL.

Quality Councils shall:

i.   Integrate RPL into their specific NQF sub-frameworks both for access and credits;

ii.   Develop and implement quality assurance mechanisms for RPL;

iii.   Monitor and report on the quality of RPL assessments within their respective sectors;

iv.   Support institutions in institutionalising RPL;

v.   Conduct advocacy and communication for RPL; and

vi.   Report on the implementation of RPL within their NQF Sub-Framework.

Provider/institutions shall:

i.   Develop institutional RPL policies in line with this Implementation Framework and national legislation and policies, norms, standards and guidelines;

ii.   Implement RPL support centres and provide necessary resources;

iii.   Train assessors and staff on RPL procedures;

iv.   Integrate RPL into relevant qualifications and programmes;

v.   Participate in awareness campaigns and information dissemination;

vi.   Pilot and institutionalise RPL processes within their institutions; and

vii.   Supply data to the relevant Quality Council in the formats required.

Employers shall:

i.   Collaborate with the Department and other relevant stakeholders in recognising the value of RPL;

ii.   Participate in awareness campaigns;

iii.   Support employees in engaging with RPL processes; and

iv.   Integrate RPL outcomes into employment.

Trade Unions, NGOs, social partners and community organisations should be included in the design of the RPL system. They may:

i.   Support the process of RPL in different ways through its development;

ii.   Shape the system and guard the interests of their constituencies; and

iii.   Be represented in relevant entities, such as sectoral councils for qualifications and others.

The individual shall:

    i.   Understand the different forms of RPL and the RPL value and processes for the specific forms of RPL that he/she wants to pursue; and

    ii.   Undergo processes to obtain access and award credits through RPL.

RPL Applicants shall:

    i.   Gather relevant information in the application process;

    ii.   Apply for RPL in a transparent and open process;

    iii.   Have access to RPL support services;

    iv.   Present the relevant evidence for assessment;

    v.   Have access to fair and standardise assessment processes; and

    vi.   Receive recognition of their competencies for access or for credit.

4.7   Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are integral components of the Implementation Framework. The Department, in collaboration with SAQA and the Quality Councils will develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan in line with the Department's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of the PSET system (2021). The Plan will be designed to systematically track and assess the effectiveness and efficiency of RPL practices and processes, ensuring that practices align with the objectives of RPL and the Implementation Framework and contributes to the overall enhancement of educational outcomes.

The purpose of the monitoring and evaluation plan is multi-fold. Firstly, it will serve to ensure accountability and transparency in the implementation of RPL, and to foster trust among stakeholders. Secondly, it will enable continuous improvement by identifying areas of strength and weakness, facilitating evidence-based decision-making for refining and optimising the Implementation Framework.

Ultimately, the Monitoring and Evaluation plan will contribute to the overall enhancement of the RPL Implementation Framework, promoting its alignment with the evolving needs of the education and training landscape within the PSET system.

Monitoring will include real-time data collection and analysis to gauge the ongoing performance of the system implementing RPL. This includes tracking the number of students/individuals entering and completing their specific endeavour through RPL, and identifying any bottlenecks or challenges faced. It will also track the progress and challenges of specific providers applying different forms of RPL.

On the other hand, the evaluation component is geared towards providing a comprehensive analysis of the RPL Implementation Framework's impact over a specified period. This involves a thorough examination of the achieved outcomes against the predefined goals, assessing the quality and fairness of assessments, and soliciting feedback from stakeholders, including both candidates and assessors.

4.8   Review of the Implementation Framework

The Implementation Framework is designed to undergo regular and systematic reviews to ensure its effectiveness and alignment with evolving requirements. These reviews will be conducted every five years, providing a structured approach to assess the Framework's performance and adaptability. Additionally, these reviews will serve as a mechanism to stay abreast of changes in educational policies, industry standards, and technological advancements, ensuring that the RPL Implementation Framework remains robust, responsive, and capable of fostering a dynamic and inclusive learning environment.

4.9   Effective Date

The Implementation Framework will come into effect on the day of final publication in the Government Gazette.