NATIONAL RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) CONFERENCE:
Tried and tested, tools, templates
Workshop and Conference Programme
23th – 26th February 2014
Kopanong Conference Centre | Johannesburg | South Africa
RPL: ARE WE THERE YET?

Quality assurance in South African RPL practice.
DANGER OF DUST–GATHERING RPL POLICIES AS DRAWCARDS

- RPL policies, often punt ed as marketing drawcards to attract students, rarely do more than gather dust in drawers in senior managers’ offices.
- This results from a widely–felt distrust of the RPL process: a lack of clear guidelines for implementation of quality assurance mechanisms at national, institutional, faculty and individual candidate levels.
DANGER

- If strategies which are in line with post-2004 literature on RPL are not put in place to ensure QA in RPL, RPL in South Africa will not make good on its promise to eliminate past inequalities in education and another transformative initiative will die a silent death.
FAILURE TO REACH DISENFRANCHISED LEARNERS

- **Hamer (2012):**
  RPL has not reached disenfranchised learners to the degree that was optimistically hoped a decade ago.

- **Peters (2005) (in Hamer):**
  Gate-keeping occurs at the cost of those candidates with experiential learning/those adults with an alternative form of knowledge.
FAILUERE TO REACH
DISENFRANCHISED LEARNERS

- *Pitman (2009)*

- Limits are placed on the maximum number of credits awarded through RPL at universities in an effort to ensure the academic integrity of degrees.

- Credits granted must be in alignment with learning outcomes, discriminating against RPL candidates.

- RPL procedures are minimal and based on specific finite course outcomes.
Quality assurance of RPL must be undertaken with the explicit intention to protect the integrity of the processes and outcomes concerned.

2004 – 2013 INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE’S CONTRIBUTION

Which fresh perspectives on Quality Assurance in RPL in South Africa have post-2004 scholarly writings on RPL contributed?

Have the following 2013 documents prepared on RPL for the DHET contributed fresh perspectives on Quality Assurance in RPL in South Africa?

- 2013 SAQA National Policy.
- 2013 Final Report by the Ministerial Task Team.
POST–2004 PERSPECTIVES

- *Issues of TRUST* are increasing in importance: for candidates and for assessors/subject experts.

- There is an increased international call for *Simplification of the RPL Process*.
In reviewing RPL writings of the last two decades, issues of trust emerge at the forefront of RPL practice – the element of trust. Trust between candidates and assessing agencies (individual assessors, mentors or institutions) increasingly emerges as a common candidate requirement.

Quinnan (1997), Wallace (2009) and Hamer (2012): being assessed by someone who is not trusted or “recognised as expert” often prevents people from participating fully in both the RPL process and the resulting learning programme.

- Assessment should involve: making expectations explicit and public
- Setting criteria and high standards for learning quality
- Systematically gathering, analysing and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches expectations and standards
- Using resultant information to document, explain and improve performance
Quality in education should be about:
- what students have learned
- institutions’ responsiveness to their students’ needs
- accountability to the taxpayer.
CHALLENGES OF TRUST IN ASSESSMENT IN ODL: Letseka & Pitsoe (cont)

Challenges of trust in an ODL environment to sufficiently ascertain:

- what students know;
- what they can do;
- what attitudes result from interacting with the learning material
- does interaction with learning material occur at all?

- Well-written, well-argued coherent assignments, but dismal performance in examinations. Are we assessing what we should be assessing?

- steer clear of overly bureaucratic approaches and instrumental practice;
- devolve decision-making powers to faculties,
- eliminate “multiple layers of bureaucracy” (Singh, 2011).
A strategy for Quality Assurance should form an integral part of the process of RPL.

It should include a number of variables:
- be based on international best practice;
- be customised to meet the challenges of the unique South African context;
- incorporate RPL–user perspectives.
HAMER (2010, 2011): SIMPLIFY THE RPL PROCESS

- Increase recognition of the *person*, which should not mean simplistic assessment or relying on “process without engagement”.

Assessors should:

- be able to disregard performance criteria and make professional judgements based on a “holistic view“ of the candidate’s abilities.
- be cognisant of the relationship between themselves and the candidate, especially in cross-cultural situations.
ISSUES OF QUALITY

- The issue of Quality Assurance becomes crucial once assessors move away from familiar checklist approaches.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY DESIGN FOR RPL

- Smith’s 2004 strategy design for the implementation and management of RPL is built around three specialised activities to be carried out systematically:
  - *Plan RPL*;
  - *Implement RPL*;
  - *Quality assure* RPL processes.
STRATEGY DESIGN: (Subsection): Quality Assurance

Have the following 2013 RPL documents prepared for the DHET contributed fresh perspectives on Quality Assurance in RPL in South Africa:

- 2013 SAQA National Policy.
- 2013 Final Report by the Ministerial Task Team?

- Recommendations contribute new perspectives to Smith’s 2004 strategy design (subsection: Quality Assurance) for RPL.
INTEGRATED STRATEGY DESIGN FOR RPL: (SMITH 2004)

- **FUNCTIONS**
  - Procedures: step by step *processes*

- **FUNCTIONS**
  - Procedures: step by step *processes*

- **FUNCTIONS**
  - Procedures: step by step *processes*
LEVELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

INSTITUTIONAL

AGENCY

CANDIDATE
9 UPDATED PERSPECTIVES

**International**
1. A movement away from a mechanistic checklist mentality, towards an holistic assessment of the potential of the person.

**National**
2. In order for this to occur, the DHET must establish the necessary national, and international infrastructure as a first step. In the interim, SAQA is carrying out a national co-ordinating role.

**Institutional**
3. At institutional level, emerging guidelines support a partnership between assessor and candidate,
4. where insight is arrived at through collaboration and
5. an integrated development path is negotiated for the candidate.
6. Assessor training at institutional levels must assist the assessor to set expert knowledge aside,
7. to make value and normative judgements about the potential of the candidate, based on evidence and an academically rigorous process.
8. Ideally this should occur in tandem with other assessors.
9. While individual HEIs have very little influence on the national and international infrastructural arrangements of the SA government, they are able to implement the following procedures aimed at establishing structures for QA in RPL.
STRATEGY FOR AN INTEGRATED QA APPROACH AT HEI’s

- The following table represents Quality Assurance RPL as a subsection of a complete implementation strategy (Smith, 2004).
- It reflects updated procedures gleaned from the above analysis of definitions, DHET documents and international literature on RPL and Quality.
# INTERNATIONAL & NATIONAL

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<tr>
<th>SPECIALISED ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>LEVELS</th>
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<tr>
<td>QUALITY ASSURE RPL</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTERNATIONAL (Supra-national)</td>
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<td>Benchmark national insights against international RPL practice and standards</td>
<td>Participate in international collaboration (articles, peer review etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATIONAL (Infrastructural)</td>
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<td>Share in and contribute to national insights and standards</td>
<td>Recognise SAQA as national co-ordinating body</td>
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<td>Ensure consumer protection</td>
<td>Accredit providers</td>
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<td>Develop an RPL practitioner professional registration and Continuing Professional Development processes</td>
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## INSTITUTIONAL

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<tr>
<td>QUALITY ASSURE RPL</td>
<td>INSTITUTIONAL (HEI/FET/provider/institute)</td>
<td>Benchmark processes and procedures against international and national standards, client needs and ISO standards to ensure procedural compliance. Partner South African HEIs Collaborate with other stakeholders</td>
<td>Establish/uphold credible institutional reputation Conduct regular research Deliver papers at national and international forums Participate in inter-institutional peer reviews Partner with South African HEIs to share resources Collaborate with Quality Councils, industry, communities and other national stakeholders</td>
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| INSTITUTIONAL (HEI/FET/provider/institute) | Ensure public accountability  
Consider regional, cultural, linguistic and unique differences  
Review RPL regularly, improve, documents and communicate changes  
Simplify RPL processes  
Avoid excessive evaluation and over-assessment | Report regularly and maintain transparency and fairness  
Establish a credible reputation in RPL  
Establish a credible, user-friendly RPL appeals process  
Design a differentiated range of processes, activities and processes to accommodate variations  
Publicise RPL criteria and standards  
Conduct periodic institutional RPL reviews  
Conduct periodic inter-departmental peer reviews  
Monitor standards of assessment and accreditation  
Conduct longitudinal learner monitoring  
Develop an integrated Management system  
Accommodate regional and multilingual needs |
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<td>QUALITY ASSURE RPL</td>
<td>AGENCY (Department/faculty)</td>
<td>Ensure uniform standards of assessment across disciplines Simplify RPL processes. Train RPL assessors Appoint assessment panels: subject experts, community leaders, industry Partner the candidate</td>
<td>Adequately train/oversee training of assessors in all subject fields in RPL principles and use of assessment tools Train for flexibility, dig deep and interrogate candidate’s knowledge Train for suspension of expert knowledge, and holistic assessment of the person Train assessors to make normative judgements; be non-prejudicial and equitable Train assessors to recommend a way forward for the candidate: for gap-filling, for developing an integrated development path Conduct regular inter-departmental peer reviews Ensure trained RPL assessor presence in all interviews/random samples Ensure assessor training to avoid a checklist mentality Ensure assessor training to ensure a range of processes, activities, differentiation of RPL processes and assessment tools Ensure uniform standard of assessment reports Ensure uniform standard of depersonalised feedback to candidates Monitor success rates of RPL candidates and investigate deviations Insert checks and balances in administrative process to eliminate errors (eg correctness of subject codes, correct entries on academic records etc) Train assessors to establish relationships of trust with the candidate by respecting his/her knowledge, self, being non-prejudicial and equitable Establish a partnership with the candidate, and make a collaborative effort to accredit the candidate.</td>
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## CANDIDATE

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<tr>
<td>CANDIDATE</td>
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<td>Monitor candidate satisfaction with process and /or outcomes of assessment</td>
<td>Request feedback from candidate on the assessment and accreditation processes</td>
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REFERENCES