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Recognition of Prior Learning

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1. INTRODUCTION

Optimi College (Pty) Ltd, trading as *College SA*, is dedicated to recognize prior learning¹ within our framework of quality assurance² and academic practice³.

We are committed to uphold the legislation⁴ and standards⁵ outlined in the National Qualifications Framework Act (No. 67 of 2008), in the context of the criteria developed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

In terms of the NQF Act, College SA has developed our Recognition of Prior Learning Policy⁶ (RPL) towards satisfying the regulatory requirements of the two sub-frameworks⁷ represented by the following Quality Assurance Councils:

- The Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi)
- The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)

College SA's policies are integral to our approach, and articulate consistently how we meet our regulatory requirements. They are reviewed annually to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

❖ Please refer to Section 10, Glossary of Terms, that should be read in conjunction footnotes

¹ **Recognition of prior learning:** a process through which formal, non-formal and informal learning are measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts and certified against the requirements for credit, access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system or workplace

² **Quality assurance:** the maintenance of a desired level of quality in a service or product, especially by means of attention to every stage of the process of delivery or production

³ **Academic Practice:** professional work which directly contributes to the generation and dissemination of knowledge. This includes teaching and learning, research, and supervising and managing research; and managing academic departments.

⁴ **Legislation:** laws about a certain area or topic, considered as a whole

⁵ **Standards:** something used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations

⁶ **Policy:** a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual. A policy may also serve the 'theoretical' basis for a procedure

⁷ **Sub-framework:** the divisions within an overarching framework



2. PURPOSE

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa is critical to the development of an equitable⁸ higher education system that facilitates access, mobility and progression within Quality Assurance Councils in accordance with the NQF Act.

The purpose of the policies outlined in this document is to provide guidelines within *College SA* to:

- Facilitate students access
- To recognize formal and or informal training
- To avoid duplication of learning already covered

RPL provides an opportunity for the student to identify their learning, have it assessed and formally acknowledged.

At *College SA*, our RPL policy promotes lifelong learning based on the principles of equity⁹ and inclusivity¹⁰. We strive towards protecting the quality and standards of the qualifications of *College SA*.

These objectives are echoed in the Department of Higher Education's (DHET's) White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: A Programme for Transformation (2014) Policy that states that "higher education institutions [must] make every effort to avoid unfair and irrational barriers to acceptance and credit transfer" and must remain committed to providing "equitable and flexible opportunities for students to 'enter and succeed' in higher education".

3. SCOPE

The RPL policy applies to *College SA*; all qualifications or part-qualifications that are registered on the NQF and are, therefore, registered in the context of the criteria of SAQA.

RPL is multi-contextual: how it takes place differs from one context to another. RPL may be developed and implemented differently for the purposes of personal development, further learning and advancement in the workplace, and recognition within the three sub-frameworks of the NQF.

⁸ **Equitable:** *fair and impartial; treating all in an unbiased and equal manner*

⁹ **Equity:** *the practice of being fair and unbiased*

¹⁰ **Inclusivity:** *an intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who are handicapped or learning-disabled, or racial and sexual minorities*

We honour the two co-ordinated sub-frameworks, each overseen by its own Quality Council which is responsible for implementing the RPL process in its sector; viz.:

- The General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi
- The Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) overseen by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)

At *College SA*, the process of RPL is offered against qualifications offered within our prospective faculties. All evidence collected must be evaluated using the stipulated learning outcomes and assessment criteria from the qualification or unit being claimed. All faculties must have lecturers with appropriate expertise and knowledge to facilitate this and to make decisions about RPL. Evidence used for RPL will be subject to standards' verification as per normal.

All RPL practices, processes and procedures will be rigorous as well as conducted in accordance with the principles of assessment prescribed by the Quality Council in question within the implementation guidelines of SAQA.

4. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality assurance of RPL practices, processes and procedures is essential for achieving the objectives of RPL within the context of the NQF. The intention of quality assurance is to protect the integrity of the processes and outcomes of RPL.

College SA quality assurance processes address the specificities of the RPL process (including applications, assessments, and reporting and management systems) and the administrative and support systems, both prior to and after an RPL assessment.

The goal here is to develop and enhance the capacity to implement RPL progressively in accordance with this policy and the specific RPL policy of the sub-framework(s) within which their qualifications are offered.

The following key elements are highlighted:

- Ensure that *College SA* has the necessary staff capacity to deliver quality RPL services and programmes
- Ensure effective planning and funding for RPL administrative and logistical systems to support all programmes and services
- Put systems and procedures in place to incentivise and support the registration and continuing professional development of RPL practitioners



- Provide advice, counselling and support services to assist RPL candidates prior to, during and after the RPL processes
- Establish an appeals process for RPL candidates to engage with and challenge RPL-related judgements
- Ensure an equitable fee structure for all RPL programmes and services, including those programmes and services that involve the assessment of experiential learning for credit against existing formal qualifications or part qualifications
- Develop an information management system that meets the requirements of the relevant quality assurance body Council, the NLRD, and other relevant government information management systems.

5. THE RPL PROCESS

5.1 PRINCIPLES

The following principles inform the RPL process:

- RPL may be used to grant access to a qualification programme or advanced standing/exemption from modules or courses constitutive of a particular qualification.
- No credits should be awarded for the modules or courses that a student is exempted from doing based on RPL. Therefore, any students who are granted exemption from doing some modules or courses in a qualification programme will complete the qualification with a total number of credits less than the normally required number of credits for the qualification in question.
- Full qualifications cannot be awarded solely based on RPL. Similarly, exemption based on RPL should be limited to no more than 50% of the modules or courses of the qualification programme in question. This means that no student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any higher education qualification.
- It is recommended that not more than 10% of a cohort¹¹ of students in a higher education programme should be admitted through an RPL process.
- The candidate must be provided with the appropriate advice, guidance and support at all stages of the process which should recognise the diversity¹² of learners and their experience.

¹¹ **Cohort:** a group of people with shared characteristics; i.e. students in this case

¹² **Diversity:** the inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization; programmes at educational institutes intended to promote diversity through education, awareness and sensitivity



5.2 STAGES IN THE RPL PROCESS

Steps	Action	Role-player
Application	Candidate makes application for RPL by compiling RPL Portfolio Pre-assessments to determine suitability of the candidate RPL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College SA • Student • RPL Advisor/ Assessor¹³
Preparation	RPL candidate advised, counselled and assisted in preparing for assessment Preparation of the assessment tools, environment and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPL Advisor/ Assessor
Conduct Assessment	RPL assessor reviews and evaluates evidence RPL assessor makes a judgement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPL Assessor
Feedback	Feedback is given to candidate Feedback is sought from candidate Appeal may be lodged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student • Internal Moderator • College SA
Re-mediation/ re-assessment	If necessary, re-mediation takes place in accordance with Assessment Policy and re-assessment takes place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RPL Assessor • Student
Moderation ¹⁴	Internal and external moderation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal Moderator • External Moderator
Certification	The candidate is certificated accordingly The information is uploaded onto the NLRD and QAP processes are followed	

¹³ **RPL Assessor:** A person credited with Unit Standard 115753 with the ETDP SETA, which are able to conduct outcome-based assessment in a fair, valid, reliable and practicable manner.

¹⁴ **Moderation:** *the process of ensuring that assessments have been conducted in line with agreed practices, and are fair, reliable and valid. The generic assessor standard registered by SAQA entitled 'Moderate assessment' outlines the process in detail. One moderator usually checks the work of several assessors to ensure consistency. The management of moderation is the responsibility of the provider.*



6. CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER

Following the finalization of SAQA's RPL and Credit Accumulation and Transfer ¹⁵(CAT) policies in 2014, and the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) policy on RPL in 2016, the CHE developed an integrated policy on RPL, CAT and assessment for higher education.

In accordance with these policies, *College SA* recognizes that CAT is critical to ensure that students can receive formal recognition and certification of a learning achievement. It allows for articulation ¹⁶ across the sub-frameworks of the NQF to facilitate lifelong learning and provide for the mobility of students as well as to enhance their chances of successfully completing their qualifications.

College SA has, therefore, formulated a separate policy to outline the CAT process.

7. ASSESSMENT

Assessment is central to learning and teaching because it is the key mechanism for evaluating the progression of students. As such, it is the basis for awarding credits and, ultimately, qualifications.

College SA has developed a separate policy on assessment on the basis of the understanding that assessment is a critical process employed to identify, gather and interpret information and evidence that would enable reasonably objective judgments to be made regarding the extent to which a student has achieved the learning outcomes of a course or module that leads to a qualification.

¹⁵ **CAT:** *an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.*

- **Credit accumulation:** *the totalling of relevant credits required to complete a qualification or part-qualification*
- **Credit transfer:** *the relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions*

¹⁶ **Articulation:** *the process by which one institution matches its courses or requirements to course work completed at another institution. Students use course articulation to assure that courses they complete will not have to be repeated at the institution to which they are transferring.*

College SA has developed recommended fee structures for RPL with reference to SAQA guidelines for consistent and fair costing of RPL programmes and services in line with our commitment to equity and inclusivity. The following must be taken into account in developing RPL fee structures:

- RPL costs to candidates should be minimised so as to be affordable for those whom it is meant to serve.
- RPL fees should be less than the cost of the learning programme or module.
- Fees charged for RPL should be based on the services performed in the process and not on the number of credits awarded.
- Fee structures must encourage participation in RPL, not create barriers for or exclude potential candidates.
- Flexible payment options should be provided and bursaries should be made available for deserving candidates.



8. LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES

CHE Policy on the Recognition of Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in Higher Education

National Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SAQA, 2014)

National Policy for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part Qualifications and Professional Designations (SAQA, 2014)

National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2013)

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008

National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (NO. 67 OF 2008); Draft Articulation Policy

NQF Level Descriptors (SAQA, 2012)

NQFpedia: Standard Glossary of Terms Related to the National Qualifications Framework (SAQA, 2014)

Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy (DHET, 2016)

The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (2013)

The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework (2002)

The revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2015)

White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013)

9. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Please refer to the following document that should be read in conjunction with all College SA policy documents: NQFpedia: Standard Glossary of Terms Related to the National Qualifications Framework (SAQA, 2014).

Academic Practice	<i>Professional work which directly contributes to the generation and dissemination of knowledge. This includes teaching and learning, research, and supervising and managing research; and managing academic departments.</i>
Articulation	<i>The process by which one institution matches its courses or requirements to course work completed at another institution. Students use course articulation to assure that courses they complete will not have to be repeated at the institution to which they are transferring.</i>
Cohort	<i>A group of people with shared characteristics; i.e. students in this case</i>
Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)	<p><i>An arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credit accumulation: <i>the totalling of relevant credits required to complete a qualification or part-qualification</i> • Credit transfer: <i>the relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions</i>
Diversity	<i>The inclusion of different types of people (as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organisation; programmes at educational institutes intended to promote diversity through education, awareness and sensitivity</i>
Equitable	<i>Fair and impartial; treating all in an unbiased and equal manner</i>
Equity	<i>The practice of being fair and unbiased</i>
Inclusivity	<i>An intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalised, such as those who are handicapped or learning-disabled, or racial and sexual minorities</i>
Legislation	<i>Laws about a certain area or topic, considered as a whole</i>
Moderation	<i>The process of ensuring that assessments have been conducted in line with agreed practices, and are fair, reliable and valid. The generic assessor standard registered by SAQA entitled 'Moderate assessment' outlines the process in detail. One moderator usually checks the work of several assessors to ensure consistency. The management of moderation is the responsibility of the provider.</i>
Policy	<i>A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organisation or individual. A policy may also serve the 'theoretical' basis for a procedure</i>
Quality assurance	<i>The maintenance of a desired level of quality in a service or product, especially by means of attention to every stage of the process of delivery or production.</i>



Recognition of prior learning	<i>A process through which formal, non-formal and informal learning are measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts and certified against the requirements for credit, access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system or workplace.</i>
Standards	<i>Something used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations</i>
Sub-framework	<i>The divisions within an overarching framework</i>

