

**POLICY ON THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR
LEARNING (RPL)**

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

DATE OF APPROVAL BY RELEVANT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:

[Also provide name of Committee e.g. Institutional Forum, Quality Assurance Committee]

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE: 9 March 2007

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL: 15 March 2007

COMMENCEMENT

DATE: [Date Policy first implemented]

REVISION HISTORY: [Date of first approval by Senate/Council and number of subsequent revisions]

REVIEW DATE: Every three years

POLICY LEVEL: All academic staff, administrative staff, students and prospective students

RESPONSIBILITY

- IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING: Registrar
- REVIEW AND REVISION: Teaching and Learning Committee

REPORTING STRUCTURE: Relevant HODs, Deans, Registrar, Senate → Council

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) furthers the democratic, human rights and transformative goals of the University's vision and mission and is also a requirement in terms of national legislation and policy. Mindful of the complexities involved, the University commits itself to the careful and responsible use of RPL to improve access to higher education in accordance with quality assurance objectives.

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:

This policy aims to ensure that:

2.2.1 RPL is used, wherever appropriate, as an alternative means of admission to undergraduate programmes, for credit towards qualifications or courses, and for postgraduate admission on an advanced standing, or *ad eundem gradum*, basis.

2.2.2 RPL is implemented as an integral part of mainstream assessment and evaluative policies and procedures.

2.2.3 Any extension of the use of RPL beyond the areas of current practice is undertaken with sufficient planning and resources by suitably qualified staff to ensure credibility, effectiveness and sustainability.

2.2.4 RPL processes and assessment procedures are transparent and valid.

2.2.5 Research into RPL is encouraged and supported.

2.3 DEFINITION:

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the practice of awarding credit or granting educational access to students on the basis of prior learning acquired through a variety of formal, non-formal and informal means, including life and work experience. In South Africa the pursuit of a transformative agenda is of critical importance and RPL is seen as a necessary component in attaining an equitable educational system which will not only benefit young learners but also redress inequalities by providing meaningful opportunities to those denied educational access in the past.

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 THE ACTIONS AND PROCESSES BY WHICH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY WILL BE ACHIEVED:

3.1.1 Introduction

The implementation of RPL is particularly complex in the field of higher education and relates to highly contested debates about the nature of knowledge and learning, pedagogy, assessment, institutional autonomy and the character of institutions of higher learning and the education they provide.

In the National Standards Body's Regulations issued in 1998 in terms of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995, RPL is defined in terms of learning outcomes, with an emphasis on credit rather than further access:

Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.

The legislature on matriculation exemption as a requirement for university entrance and prerequisite for the award of degrees is a factor which currently limits and complicates the admission and throughput of RPL-qualified candidates.

The SAQA policy, "The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African NQF" (2002), proposes the following "strategic framework" for the implementation of RPL:

1. Audit of current practice
2. The development of detailed sector-specific plans
3. Capacity building of resources and staff
4. The design and moderation of appropriate assessment instruments and tools
5. Quality management systems and procedures
6. The establishment of a research base

In line with the above framework, implementation of an RPL policy at Rhodes needs to begin with the examination and documentation of the ways in which RPL is already practised, along with investigation into possibilities for the extension of RPL in the future.

3.1.2 Current practice

RPL is currently practised in three different ways within the University:

- An admissions test is used as a means of alternative admission into undergraduate programmes for disadvantaged learners lacking matriculation endorsement.
- Applicants lacking the necessary formal qualification (an Honours degree) may be admitted by Senate, on the recommendation of Heads of Departments, Deans and Faculties, to Master's degree study as *ad eundem gradum* candidates.
- Limited use is made of RPL to award credits towards certain qualifications.

Regarding the currently limited use of RPL for credit at Rhodes, it is unlikely that there will be large numbers of potential RPL adult applicants in the short term. The entering cohort of undergraduates comprises almost entirely recent school-leavers.

3.1.3 Future implementation of RPL in learning programmes

In order to satisfy auditing and quality assurance requirements and build up a research base relating to the use of RPL at Rhodes, it is important that current practices be recorded, documented and monitored. Accordingly,

3.1.3.1 The Registrar's Division will compile an "evidence portfolio" of Senate's reasons for granting students *ad eundem gradum* admission status to Master's degrees in order to guide departments. Senate will assess applications on the evidence provided by candidates and departments in each case, relying on the professional and academic judgment of Heads of Department, Deans, Faculty Boards and members of Senate rather than on prescriptive criteria.

3.1.3.2 Those Faculties which are currently using RPL to award credit will document the principles and procedures they apply in using RPL in their programmes for approval by the Academic Planning and Staffing Committee and Senate. Once approved, these will be published on the Rhodes University Intranet.

Departments or Faculties which seek in future to introduce RPL will be required to obtain the approval of Senate on recommendation from the Academic Planning and Staffing Committee. Requests for approval should conform to the following requirements:

- 3.1.3.3 Appropriate assessment instruments should be specified.
- 3.1.3.4 The procedures by which applicants apply for RPL should be clearly indicated and, once approved, published.
- 3.1.3.5 Credit granted on the basis of RPL should not exceed 50% of the credits required for the qualification.
- 3.1.3.6 Recognition of prior learning for purposes of access will focus on a candidate's capacity to succeed whereas RPL for credit will focus on the equivalence of the prior learning to the Rhodes credits being sought.

3.2 REVIEW PROCEDURE:

- 3.2.1 The Teaching and Learning Committee shall review the policy every three years, by June of the relevant year.
- 3.2.2 Any proposed changes to the policy would need to be referred by the Teaching and Learning Committee to the Faculty Boards for comment and then to Senate and Council for approval.
- 3.2.3 As and when the policy is revised the examinations manual and the Higher Degrees Guide will be updated.