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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: AN ELUSIVE GOAL FOR THE NON-FORMAL LEARNER?

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

Johannesburg, 2005

II. Abstract

Recognition of prior learning (RPL), the practice of valuing adults' learning, derived from formal, informal or non-formal contexts, forms a key component of the transformational agenda of the education landscape in South Africa. Yet few institutions of higher education in South Africa practice RPL.

The aim of this study is to provide insight into RPL by evaluating its current practice at one institution of higher education, the University of Fort Hare, highlighting its successes and challenges.

The sources of information for this study included past RPL candidates, RPL assessors and co-ordinators, and the policy, processes and procedures that govern the RPL process in the institution. The methods used to collect the data included interviews, observation of institutional RPL workshops and an analysis of relevant RPL documentation.

The research results suggest that there has been a limited uptake of RPL, which has impeded a holistic approach to RPL. Challenges include the draft status of an institutional policy, inconsistent RPL practices, the limitations of some of the RPL assessment methods, the lack of RPL data systems, the costs associated with supporting RPL candidates, the duplication of resources and practices, and the impact on academic workloads. A series of recommendations have been made to address these and other challenges highlighted in the research results.

Key words: recognition of prior learning (RPL); higher education; South Africa; accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL); adult education; policy; process; knowledge; South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

III. Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Ms Jayshree Sona Thakrar

_____ day of _____ 2005



To dad, I wish you were here for this

To mum, I dedicate this to you

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VII. Acronyms and Abbreviations

CHE	Council on Higher Education
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
FHIG	Fort Hare Institute of Government
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ISP	In-Service Programme Unit
M&C	Management & Commerce
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PFSA	Public Financial Services Agency
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In 1995, at the age of 27, I attended an interview at a university in England. The interview lasted about ninety minutes and required me to give a synopsis of my previous nine years' work experience, including my brief foray into the world of corporate training, my voluntary work, my travels, and my aspirations. The result of that interview was that I received recognition of my prior learning and was given academic credit. This enabled me to complete my Bachelor of Education (Honours) Degree in two years instead of four.

A different, but related, story was recited to Michelson (2000) by a human resource manager working at Spoornet in October 1997. The tale involved a group of railway station maintenance workers who were undergoing recognition of prior learning in the area of safety:

> They were asked the purpose of a "derailment," the apparatus that is used to keep trains stationary while in the station and protected from other trains. None of them seemed to know. When the RPL results were analysed, it was pointed out that the word "derailment" was part of the vocabulary of managerial and technical personnel. The maintenance workers called the same apparatus "tortoise." In other words, it wasn't that the workers didn't know the purpose of an important safety apparatus; they just called it by another name. Yet management refused to re-administer the recognition of prior learning exercise or adjust the results to account for what had come to light.
>
> (Michelson, 2000:4)

These two incidents reveal the incongruent nature and practice of recognising prior learning, and invariably its impact on the applicants involved, emotionally, professionally, and otherwise. The contrast of these incidents also demonstrates the disparate character of institutional *will*.

The Spoornet incident also highlights another challenge, that is, giving 'credit' to knowledge, where no concerted effort had been made to incorporate the type of knowledge that characterises informal learning into the specific standard being assessed (Breier, 1997). This, together with other challenges of recognition of prior learning, is further discussed in Chapter Two.

1.2 The Research Context

The University of Fort Hare came into existence in 1916, and is the oldest historically black university in Southern Africa. Throughout its existence, Fort Hare graduates have come from as far north as Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. Some alumni, like Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Chris Hani, Robert Sobukwe, and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, demonstrate the renown of this institution; a saga of achievement amidst adversity.

Figure 1.2.1 Map of the Eastern Cape Province



The University is located on three campuses in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The oldest and original site of the university is in Alice, a poor

rural location. During the *apartheid* era, when Alice became part of the Ciskei homeland region, the institution was responsible for educating leaders and professionals for the public service.

The second campus is located in Bhisho, the current political capital of the Eastern Cape Province. The responsibility for educating the public service continues today, particularly in the School of Public Management & Development. The third campus, recently acquired as part of the national Department of Education's restructuring of higher education, is located in East London; and furnishes the institution's first opportunity for an urban presence.

On the 26th of April 2005, the University of Fort Hare received The Supreme Order of Baobab (Gold Class) from President Thabo Mbeki. The State President conferred the celebrated national Order to the University of Fort Hare in recognition of its role in the provision of academic education to legions of men and women in South Africa and Southern Africa, as well as the contribution made to the development of its leadership.

In line with the increasing economic and public financial reforms taking place both in South Africa and on a global scale, the University of Fort Hare, Faculty of Management and Commence (M&C), identified a need for a Public Financial Services Agency (PFSA) that would be able to offer a diverse range of services to the public sector. Its current client, the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, has twelve Departments with approximately 2500 civil servants working in the realm of finance.

Soon after its inception I became an employee of the PFSA. In my role as the Training & Academic Co-ordinator, I take responsibility for the design, development, delivery and evaluation of all training and academic programmes. In 2003 we conducted a financial skills profiling exercise. The field research involved 1741 civil servants who worked in finance. The key findings revealed

the sample population of civil servants to be predominately previously disadvantaged individuals with an average age of 42. 79% of them had worked in the Eastern Cape Provincial Government for more than 11 years. These civil servants would form the body of students for PFSA's training and academic interventions.

We in the PFSA are currently designing our academic programmes, in particular a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours) Degree in Public Financial Management. The practice of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) - the practice of valuing adults' learning (especially that derived from the workplace) - is an important feature for these civil servants who wish to embark on academic studies.

It is, therefore, the purpose of my study to evaluate the RPL policy, process and procedure within the Faculty of M&C at the University of Fort Hare. There are many adults in the workplace (particularly in the Eastern Cape Provincial Government), who wish to embark on higher education studies but who do not have the requisite academic entrance qualifications. I believe RPL can make an important contribution to higher education as part of a range of flexible learning options. It can also support the extension of education to new categories of students.

1.3 RPL in South Africa

> In the past, assessment in South Africa was characterised by an emphasis on exclusion. It was used to justify why many applicants failed to get places at learning institutions and access to vacancies at work. The vast majority of those excluded were black – because the assessment procedures and methods reflected, and in some cases even exaggerated, the legacy of Bantu Education.
>
> (National Training Board, 1994:1)

RPL is very much part of the South African National Educational Policy framework. The demise of *apartheid* and the birth of democracy brought about

the need to increase access to employment and further learning opportunities for the previously disadvantaged sector of the population, through recognition of the knowledge and skills they may already possess.

Studies by Harris (1997) and Osman (2003) indicate, though, that much work has yet to be done at both a national policy level and at an educational institutional level. In particular, Osman (2003) draws attention to the dearth of research in South Africa on the value of particular assessment methods and approaches to RPL.

The legacy of Bantu Education in South Africa has left many previously disadvantaged people with a poor education. Breier (1997) points out that:

> Many will not have the basic education (and literacy and numeracy) that tends to be taken for granted in international literature on RPL, presenting particular problems for the design of assessment procedures.
>
> (1997:199)

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

As a researcher, I plan to investigate how the Faculty of M&C has developed tools, processes and procedures for RPL, and what the implications are for the plethora of civil servants who bring years of work experience, and thus tacit knowledge, to the institution but lack a traditional academic background.

The aim of this study is, therefore, to evaluate the tools, processes and procedures that have been devised for RPL within the Faculty of M&C. In particular, I plan to look at those programmes that seek to recognise work-based learning. I plan to investigate and analyse the experiences and views of students and academics during the RPL process, and then present recommendations concerning RPL to the Faculty of M&C.

The specific research questions that framed this study are as follows:

1. Since 2000, how many students in the Faculty of M&C were awarded recognition (either access or credit) of prior learning acquired in the workplace? What trends could be attributed to the numbers identified and the recognition awarded?
2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, tools, processes and procedures that were applied when admitting students through the RPL process?
3. What were the experiences, successes and challenges of both students and academics involved in the RPL process?

1.5 The Remainder of the Study

The balance of this research report is organised as follows:

- Chapter Two presents a review of related literature, as guided by the research questions identified for this study.
- Chapter Three outlines the research design and methodology that underpin the study.
- Chapter Four gives a detailed account of the findings of the study.
- Chapter Five summarises the study and forms conclusions and provides recommendations.

2. A Review of Related Literature

To help me answer the research questions presented in Chapter One, I have identified a number of themes to guide my review of related literature. Firstly I will introduce the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and why there is a strong emphasis on the need, as well as a legal requirement of RPL, in South Africa. Secondly I shall look at the notion of giving 'credit' to knowledge. Thirdly I shall present some of the methods used to assess RPL and the outcomes that can be attributed to it. Finally I shall look at the status of RPL policies and practices in Higher Education Institutions, their challenges and successes.

2.1 RPL: The Legal Framework

As far back as the 1970s, black trade unions' demands for higher wages were regularly rejected on the grounds that an unskilled labour force could not command higher wages. Around the same time there was a movement in South Africa demanding changes in the education system, epitomised by the Soweto uprising in 1976.

Throughout the 1980s the demands for change continued, and by the early 1990s the Government finally recognised the necessity for change, engulfing every world nation, in the face of rapid development, politically, technologically and geographically. With the advent of democracy in 1994, the new South Africa was welcomed back into the global arena. In order to compete socially and economically, there was a strong need to reorganise the education and training system of the country, to respond to the ever-changing influences of the external environment.

The philosophy behind the National Qualifications Framework (SAQA, 2005:1) was a belief that if learners could identify transparent learning pathways that

provide, ‘access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths, they are more inclined to improve their skills and knowledge.’

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) commenced its function in 1996, mandated to oversee the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework.

RPL is statutory. It is promulgated in the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) and the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998), and governed by the following guidelines:

- National Standards Board Regulation No 18787 (28th March 1998)
- ETQA Bodies Regulations No 19231 (8th September 1998)
- Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards (SAQA, October 2001)
- The Recognition of Prior Learning in the Context of South African National Qualifications Framework (June 2002)
- Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2004)

Appreciating that different qualifications make different demands on curriculum development and delivery, and on assessment and teaching, SAQA established a hierarchy of bodies responsible for the setting of standards and quality assurance.

One such body is the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), whose constituent members (referred to as providers), amongst others, include:

1. Departments of Education (National and Provincial)
2. Universities

SAQA regulations require all quality assurance bodies and their providers to have in place a quality management system that includes policies, procedures and review mechanisms for quality assurance. In addition, these regulations specify that evidence of the provider's quality management systems, which cover policies and practices for the management of assessment (and this would include RPL) must be demonstrated, as a criterion for the accreditation of providers.

The SAQA RPL policy document (2002b) goes on to emphasise that RPL should form part of institutional assessment policies and, furthermore, should include the moderation, management and reporting procedures that constitute an institution's quality management system.

2.2 The Need for RPL

> Adults engage continually in learning activities – even when they are not enrolled in continuing education programmes … As these adult students enter collegiate programmes, they rightfully ask that the knowledge they have gained through prior learning – including their work and life experiences – be recognised in terms of academic credit or advanced standing.
>
> *(*LeGrow *et al,* 2002:2*)*

RPL is a tool that enables adults to identify their existing knowledge and skills attained informally through life and work experiences. It also enables Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to assess an adult's preparedness for formal studies and eligibility for academic credit.

RPL has its roots, as a formal practice, in the United States of America (USA), where, during the 1970s, the then Co-operative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL) sponsored an RPL Project that considered how experiential learning could be given academic credit or recognition. Similar projects occurred in the United Kingdom (UK) at the same time, in particular within the Open University.

Michelson (1999) sees RPL as grounded in American pragmatism and based specifically on the educational philosophy of Dewey (early 20th Century), which she believes 'stressed problem-solving, the relationship of education to something called "real-life" and educational access for many different kinds of people' (1999:3).

Some thirty years later, with RPL policies and practices firmly embedded in many HEIs of the USA and UK, countries such as South Africa have turned to RPL as a vehicle through which to achieve academic recognition and reward, in particular for the previously disadvantaged population:

> Recognition of Prior Learning in South Africa has, unlike similar initiatives in other countries, a very specific agenda. RPL is meant to support transformation of the education and training system of the country.
>
> (SAQA Guidelines, 2002a: 11)

The socio-political need for RPL in South Africa is driven by the notion that it will effectively increase the participation of black students in higher education, redressing a legacy of an *apartheid* era where 'millions of South Africans were denied access to quality formal education' (Breier, 1997:200).

Is the South African Government determined to position the university, once considered a centre for intellectual contemplation, as a site for driving RPL? As Pityana (2004:4) argues, 'The university may not always be in a position to meet the expectations of society; maybe universities should not even be expected to.'

Prinsloo and Buchler (2002) offer an overview of the challenges of RPL in the global arena. They found, for instance, that in New Zealand RPL was expected to provide opportunities to traditionally disadvantaged Maori people: 'RPL was expected to offer real opportunity to Maori people, and to women, whose life

experiences and associated learning have traditionally been neglected (2002:19)'

Their research concluded that the promise of RPL, made by the New Zealand Qualification Authority, notably similar to those made by SAQA (2002a), did not materialise. They identified only a few polytechnics and colleges of education where RPL processes were embedded in institutional practice, and within the higher education landscape they found RPL activity very sporadic, occurring only on the initiative of individual enthusiasts. Prinsloo and Buchler (2002) go on to identify a similar outcome in Australia.

However, Prinsloo and Buchler (2002:29) surmise that RPL has been successfully implemented in countries such as Canada and the US, 'where issues relating to transformation of society to reflect the development needs of the majority have not been part of the discourse or practice of RPL.'

There is also an economic drive for RPL in South Africa. South Africa has a disturbingly high rate of unemployment. In the Eastern Cape (where I live and work), it has been documented to be as high as 48.5% (Statistics South Africa, 2003). Unemployed adults may have acquired informal skills, which could be recognised and rewarded, enabling them to play a role in the economy of the country. However, as Breier (1997) points out, many of the South Africans who are expected to present themselves for RPL have not had the benefit of a basic education.

The Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (SAQA 2002b:31) surmises that RPL cannot be the answer to all the social, economic and political issues sketched above:

> On its own, it [RPL] is not a solution to either inequalities or unemployment, but it is an important strategy to address access to education and training for those previously excluded. As such RPL

> should be seen as a key developmental strategy – both for the system and for individuals wanting to receive recognition for their learning achieved outside of formal institutions.

RPL is certainly a compelling concept but, particularly in the South African situation, it is fraught with challenges: the scale of unemployment is high; those very adults seeking to enter the economic arena through academic studies lack advanced literacy and numeracy skills, a legacy of the *apartheid* era; and the HEIs that the government expects to support this transformation are themselves under-resourced.

2.3 Giving 'Credit' to Knowledge

> Knowledge n. 1 information and skills gained though experience or education. 2 the sum of what is known. 3 awareness gained by experience of a fact or situation.
>
> (Soanes, 2002:502)

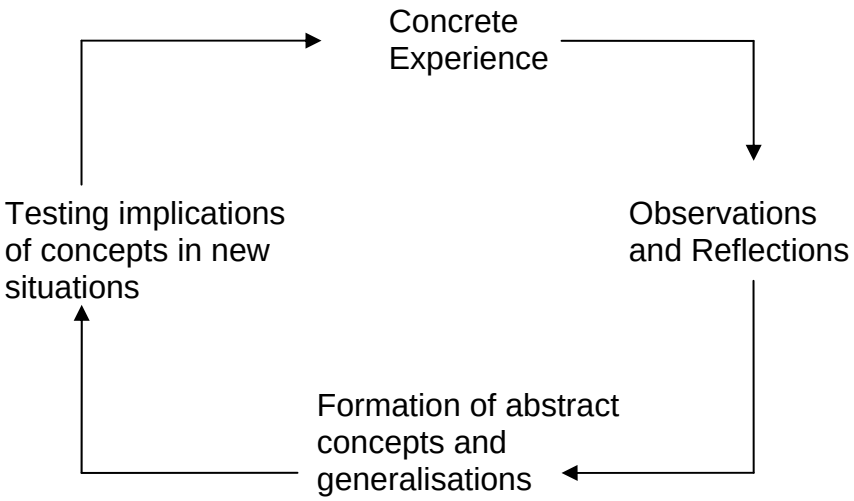
The definition of knowledge given above uses words such as 'information', 'skills' and 'experience', words synonymous with everyday life and the workplace. In his research on andragogy, a theory of adult learning, Knowles (1980) emphasises that adults have valuable experience, and skills and knowledge, derived not just from the workplace but also from everyday life. These warrant recognition, and can form the basis of further academic and personal development.

Adults seem to learn best when presented with information set in real-life contexts. Thus, the experiential approach to learning, advanced by Kolb in the 1980s, has become firmly rooted in adult learning practice.

Kolb (1981) suggests that there are four steps in the experiential learning cycle:

1. Concrete experiences – full participation in current experiences.
2. Observations and reflections – reflection on and observation of the learner's experiences from different perspectives.

3. Formation of abstract concepts and generalisations – creation of concepts that amalgamate observations into sound theories.
4. Testing implications of concepts in new situations – using these theories in new situations to make decisions and solve problems.



Kolb's model is a useful framework for designing experiential learning experiences for adults. Furthermore, organisational human resource development personnel generally place a great deal of value on experience, emphasising experiential learning as a means to improve performance.

There appears, then, to be support for the notion that knowledge attained from life experiences is of value (Kolb, 1981; Knowles, 1998). Controversy lies rather in the question of whether knowledge created in the workplace, at home or in the community, is the same as knowledge acquired in a traditional education institution.

Both Breier (1997) and Michelson (1999) dispute the argument that knowledge is the same everywhere. Michelson (1999:6) believes that knowing is a social act that cannot be separated from its enabling conditions and environment: 'we know the world differently depending on our disparate social locations: as men and women, as blacks and whites, as bearers of nationality, class and ideology.'

Breier (1997) is stronger in her argument, suggesting that performance based on learning that took place in different contexts, with different methods of acquisition, will not necessarily have similar bases of knowledge and skills. She goes on to state that there is an urgent need in South Africa to revise standards and curricula to either accommodate non-dominant forms of knowledge, or that the dominant form of knowledge (acquired through formal learning) be acknowledged far more openly. In other words, by categorically stating that only knowledge acquired in traditional formal learning sites is acceptable institutions would then facilitate RPL practice by putting into place procedures that would help non-formal learners to bridge the gaps.

Michelson (1999) cites the narrowness of RPL practices where credit is only given for knowledge that matches a particular academic module or syllabus, quite literally, bringing this rigid comparison of knowledge into question. Shalem and Steinberg (2000) provide an interesting example of an academic's contradictive assessment of knowledge of an RPL candidate's written work:

> Although Mr Makalani *does not use the terminology*, he discussed management activities *within the familiar* functional framework of planning, organising, staffing, leading and controlling … Although his experience is *within relatively small organisations*, he is aware of the *consequences of size*, in terms of information flow, functional differences of activities, and control … Mr Makalani's learning is very substantial although sometimes difficult to force into conventional academic categories. [Italics in original]
>
> (Shalem and Steinberg, 2000:4)

Castle and Attwood (2001) demonstrate that there is a growing awareness in South Africa that learning from experience should be more recognised and rewarded. But, as Osman (2003) points out, many higher education institutions have made little headway in terms of devising policies and processes that would enable such recognition to take place, as there is a great deal of ambiguity as to just how RPL should be implemented. The ambiguity exists, as

Osman and Castle (2002) argue, because of the opposed perspectives of the value of experience, in the worlds of academia and work.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) (2001) also pointed out the contentious nature of RPL in higher education:

> The challenge for implementing RPL in higher education lies in the constraints on recognising 'other' forms of knowledge from within highly specialised, abstracted and formalised knowledge forms. If higher education institutions are to take up the RPL challenge, they will need to develop appropriate, consistent and quality assured RPL policies, practices and assessment instruments based on the specification of entry requirements and learning outcomes.
>
> (CHE, 2001:104)

Harris (1999) identifies two models of RPL – the Procrustean model and the Trojan Horse model. In the former, students' knowledge is forced into sameness, into the bed of Procrustus[1]. In the latter, the student's knowledge is acknowledged to be different, challenging the notion that HEIs are the only sites of knowledge construction. As Michelson (1997a:144) points out 'there is an opportunity to enrich academic learning with alternative ways of knowing or to value knowledge for its difference from, rather than its similarity to, academic expertise.'

Michelson's words, 'similarity to academic expertise', highlights another controversy - that academics are deemed 'qualified' to distinguish workplace based knowledge, and to then compare and contrast this knowledge against academic standards. Michelson argues that academics only recognise knowledge gained through their own academic practice. As she states

[1] Procrustus, a legendary robber of ancient Attica, lived in the area of Eleusis. He captured passing travellers to fit them in one of his two beds. He had one long and one short bed. Prisoners who were small he placed on the long bed, and stretched their limbs until they fit. Tall people he placed on the small bed, and chopped off the parts that were too long.

(1999:5): ‘There is no way out of the hermeneutic circle of our own epistemological constructions and social locations.’

Therefore, where it is stated that assessors of RPL should be experts in the field, can an academic who has theoretical knowledge but lacks practical knowledge, be deemed an ‘expert in the field’? For instance, in the field of accounting, all honours qualifications focus on corporate sector finance. If an adult working in the public or not-for-profit sectors approaches an institution for RPL, I believe that most academics would not appreciate, or in some cases even be aware of, the accounting practices in those sectors. This could impact on the RPL outcomes determined under their authority.

At the international colloquium of indigenous knowledge systems held in 2004, South African and international academics made a plea for indigenous knowledge to be included in academic discourse. Indigenous knowledge refers to the skills and abilities gained from learning and sharing within an indigenous community.

In the words of Nel (2004:3):

> What they were saying, in essence, was that the knowledge, practices, values and modes of thinking of communities – which have been suppressed, marginalised and exploited by the legacy of colonialism – can and should contribute to the creation of new knowledge and new modes of thinking.

There needs to be a serious debate in South Africa as to the place indigenous knowledge holds in academic structures. For as long as the learning outcome statements stipulated in academic programmes lack recognition of indigenous knowledge, women’s and other disadvantaged groups’ knowledge and skills, they cannot be recognised in RPL. Indeed Michelson (1997a:145) questions whether academia, with its dominant values and structures, should even play

such a role, 'It would be "anathema" to have the knowledge of historically oppressed communities evaluated and accredited by a formal institution.'

We also need to consider the fact that as long as the majority of South Africans seeking RPL lack the necessary form of literacy required for the level of entry that they seek, giving credit for non-formal learning will remain a 'nice to have' practice and the demographics of adult learners in HEIs will remain the same for some time to come.

2.4 Methods of Assessing RPL

Numerous methods of assessing RPL exist. The type of method used would depend on the purpose, outcomes and assessment criteria of the qualification which the applicant seeks and, as the SAQA RPL Policy (2002a:8) points out:

> The candidate seeking credits for previously acquired skills and knowledge must still comply with all the requirements as stated in unit standards and qualifications. The difference lies in the route to the assessment.

Methods of assessing RPL include, amongst others, interview, portfolio of evidence, examination, oral examination, demonstration, debate, essay, examples of work done or performed, and special projects.

2.5 RPL Outcomes

There are a number of outcomes that could be awarded for RPL. It is important for the academic programme to clearly stipulate what the purpose of RPL will be, in order to manage the expectations of the candidate (SAQA, 2004).

Different purposes of RPL include, amongst others:

1. Access into a particular module/course or programme when a candidate is able to demonstrate through appropriate assessment(s) the exit outcomes of the module, course or programme preceding that particular module/course or programme;

2. Block credit resulting in exemption from the requirements to undertake a block component of a course/programme, for example, first semester or first year;
3. Advanced standing resulting in the award of credits towards a qualification for which a candidate has registered; and
4. Advanced status which provides access to a level higher than the logical next level of a qualification.

2.5 Current RPL Policies and Practices

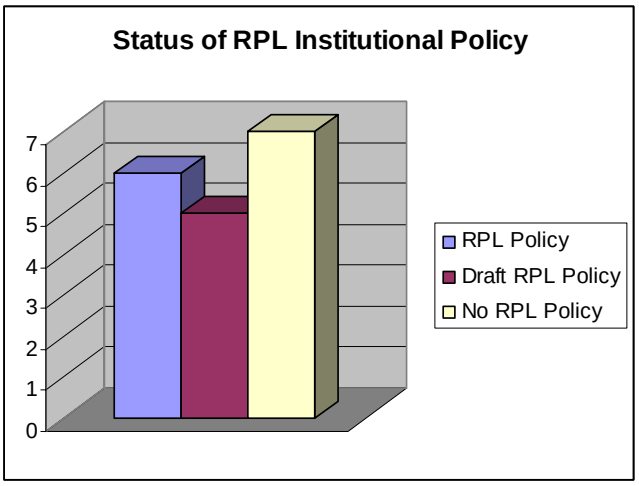
SAQA (2004:26) in its Criteria and Guidelines for the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning forewarns institutions, 'Unless proper policies, structures and resources are allocated to a credible assessment process, it can easily become an area of contestation and conflict.'

Yet, as Osman (2003:47) points out, 'in particular, there has been no published research in South Africa on the efficacy of particular assessment methods and approaches to RPL.'

A recent study of the implementation of RPL in HEIs in South Africa (Breier and Burness, 2003) was conducted to determine the status of RPL policy, models of practice and outcomes. This first phase of the research is part of a longer term project designed to develop a conceptual map of RPL policies and practices in higher education.

Sixteen universities responded to the questionnaire (76% of the total of 21 Universities). Figure 2.5.1 below details the responses regarding the status of an institutional RPL policy.

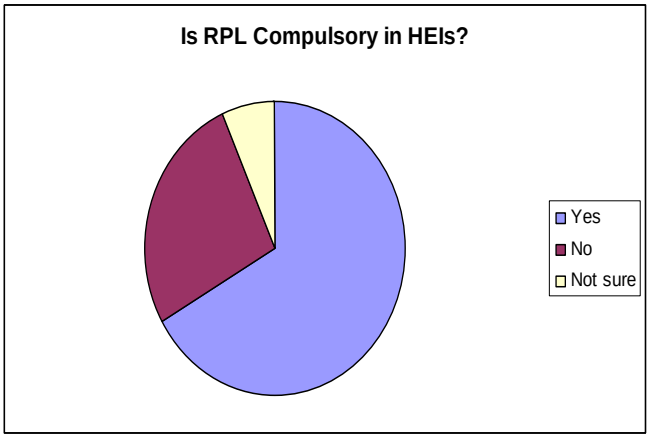
Figure 2.5.1



The figure shows that only 28% of the HEIs that responded have an institutional RPL policy. My institution is one of the respondents stating that it has a draft RPL policy.

The HEIs indicated various reasons for establishing an institutional policy on RPL. The need to comply with Government policies, such as the National Plan for Higher Education (2001), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Policy Documents (2000 and 2001), and SAQA regulations (September 2002) on RPL, were the main policies cited. Yet, there is ambiguity amongst the HEIs as to whether RPL is compulsory or not. Figure 2.5.2 details the responses given.

Figure 2.5.2



A concern then is that, despite numerous policy documents from SAQA and CHE, it remains ambiguous to higher education officials whether RPL is compulsory or not. As Breier and Burness (2003) point out in their study, the CHE has reaffirmed the policy goals of RPL, but this remains largely ignored by higher education institutions.

Figure 2.5.3

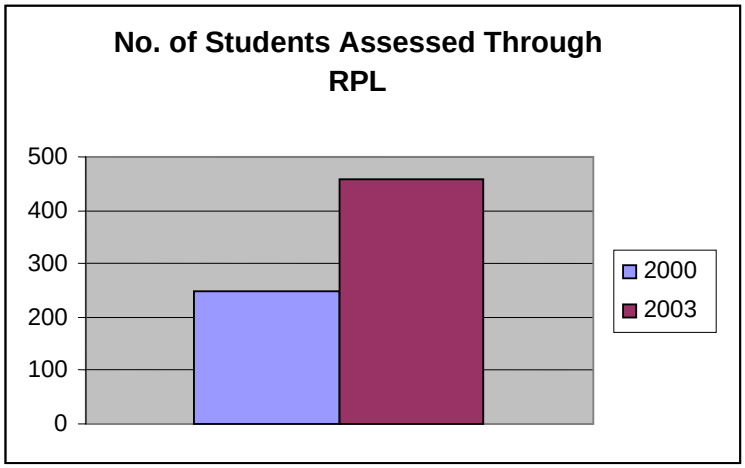


Figure 2.5.3 details the number of students assessed through RPL, either for access or advanced standing. The results indicate that a total of 459 students (across all institutions that responded, including those without RPL policies) were assessed through RPL in 2003, an increase of 84% since 2000. As Breier and Burness (2003) point out, these numbers are far from complete as few institutions have systematic records of RPL.

Most of the HEIs responding to the study (Breier and Burness, 2003) stated that implementation of RPL was left primarily to the faculties, and that with the exception of two HEIs (which had RPL offices) the assessment of RPL was also left to faculties. The most common RPL methods used are portfolios, interviews, tests, practicals, demonstrations and auditions.

Breier and Burness, (2003:iv) go on to highlight evidence of a liberal humanist model of RPL practice, where:

> The portfolio development process is sometimes seen as an end in itself, with its benefits lying in personal self-discovery and self-development rather than accreditation. We were provided with virtually no evidence of critical/radical approaches in which RPL would have been seen as a strategy for social redress, a means whereby subjugated or marginalised groups can gain access to the academy and challenge the authority of hegemonic discourses.

This is in fact unsurprising, as why would a hegemonic institution implement a counter-hegemonic policy? As Michelson (1997b) further demonstrates, portfolio-assisted RPL assessment continues to maintain conventional disciplinary organisations of knowledge:

> Indeed the questions typically asked in portfolio development exercises – such as What did you *do?* followed by What did you *learn*? – assume that knowledge must be abstracted from its experiential origins in a way that most students find both difficult and artificial. Alternative questions that might capture the immediacy and engagedness of the experiential context – What did you *do*? followed by Why did you do it? What other choices were available? How might it have been done in other circumstances? How were your choices determined by the social context? – are rarely asked.
>
> (Michelson, 1997b:43)

If, as the SAQA guidelines state, the goal of RPL is the transformation of the education landscape, then the lack of critical/radical approaches to RPL raises a concern.

Fees for RPL services varied from institution to institution, as one respondent in the study commented:

> In the future it is recommended that a fee be charged on application, when a student makes an initial case to be considered for RPL. Further stages in the process could incur further fees, on a cost recovery basis.
>
> (Breier and Burness, 2003:55)

If we refer back to the economic status and poor educational background of most South Africans highlighted above, bearing the burden of costs related to the RPL process could promulgate a view that RPL is not accessible to all.

The work of many writers, including Castle and Attwood (2001), demonstrate through the evaluation of their own experience of RPL, that the development and assessment of RPL is both time consuming, costly and demanding for the candidates, tutors, assessors and the institution itself.

The South African Government has offered little incentive to HEIs for the implementation of RPL. Indeed Castle and Attwood (2001) highlight how awarding credit for RPL is unsympathetic to the financial viability of the institution, for it loses income for every course for which credit is awarded.

A UK study of RPL in higher education (Merrifield *et al*, 2000) included a survey of RPL policy and administration in 107 HEIs and a more detailed survey of RPL procedures in 42 HEIs.

The summary findings include:

- RPL is now considered to be embedded in HEIs, but there is a gap between policy and practice;
- RPL is not widely known about or understood;
- RPL is widely regarded as time consuming and difficult;

- HEIs have high expectations of RPL students, sometimes higher than those for students on taught courses.

With further reference to the UK experience, Nyatanga *et al* (1998:31) argue that for RPL to complement the quality of programmes, it must be based on clear policy, commitment and critical appraisal by the candidates, and have the following in place:

- Institutional policy and institutional RPL regulatory framework
- Institutional self-evaluation (including critical peer review)
- Institutional audits
- Student feedback
- External views as part of the external audit.

In fact each stage of the recommended RPL practice (see Figure 2.5.4 below) has organisational implications.

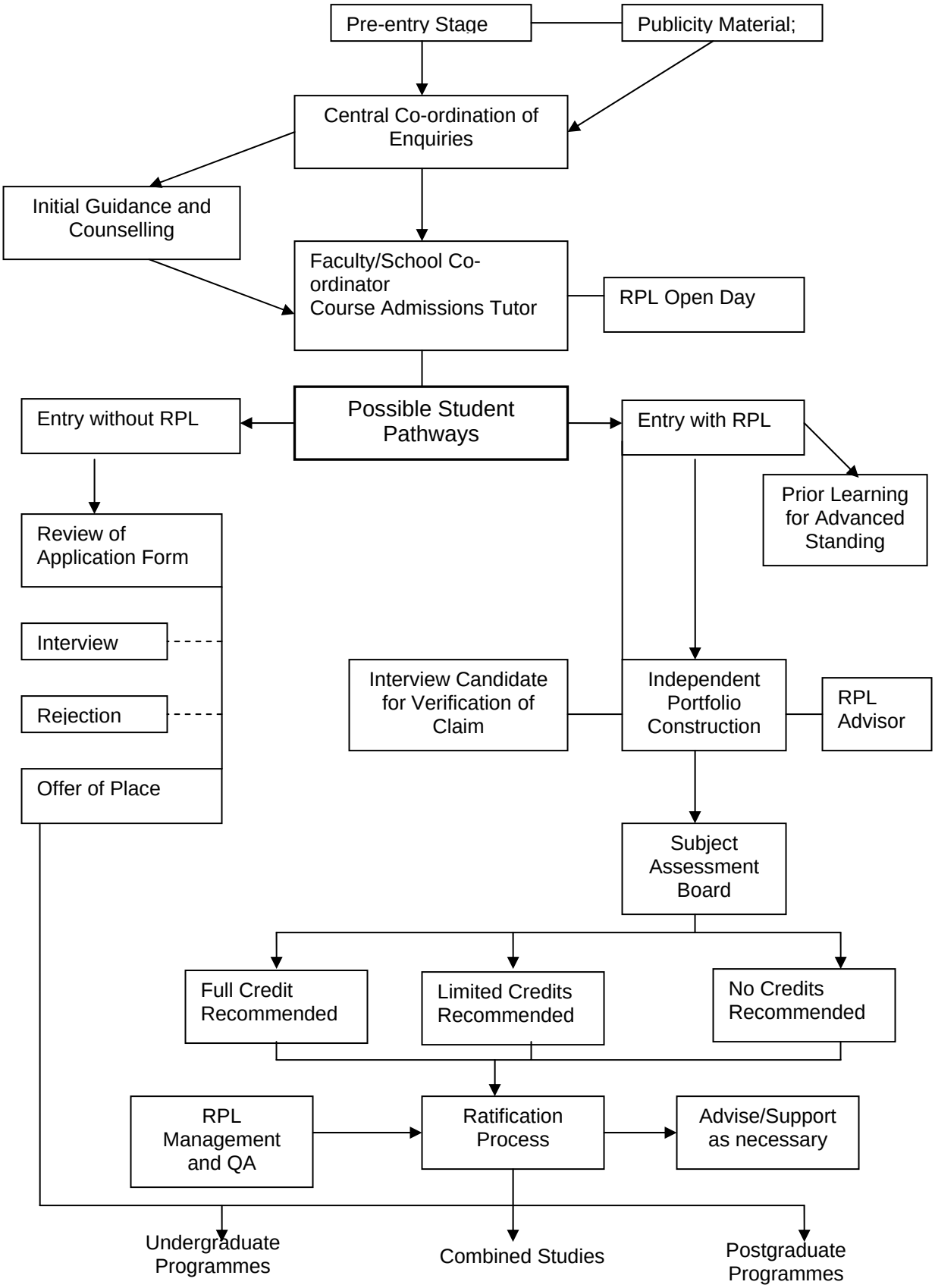


Figure 2.5.4: Macro and Micro RPL Processes (from Nyatanga *et al*, 1998:36)

What Nyatanga *et al* (1998) go on to emphasise is that, with the introduction of RPL in an institution, organisational change management should be at the forefront. If I refer to my own institution, a draft RPL policy exists and yet no recommended processes and procedures have been stipulated, or roles and responsibilities within the institutional structures assigned. No change management strategies have been deployed.

If South Africa is going to achieve its goals for RPL, then clearly, support and guidance from the national Department of Education is needed. A review of the practice in the UK (Merrifield *et al*, 2000) reveals that monetary injections into the development of the RPL practice and capacity building of resources and staff are essential, in order to accommodate RPL structures within institutions.

Finally, RPL practices will never become reality as long as the government exploits funding formulas by denying institutions any monies for candidates who receive credit for a course through RPL, as is currently the case.

2.7 Conclusion

RPL will remain an elusive goal for the non-formal learner, if national policies are not revised to address such issues as indigenous knowledge, recommended RPL practices, current funding policies and the poor educational background of many potential RPL candidates.

Furthermore, as has been shown in New Zealand, South Africa may be in danger of failing its historically disadvantaged people by placing unachievable expectations on RPL, without adequate support to both institutions offering RPL and candidates seeking RPL.

Recommendations made to UK HEIs as a result of the RPL survey (Merrifield *et al*, 2000) included:

1. Reviewing each element of the RPL practices against 'best practice' models that have been developed, particularly around quality assurance and administration.
2. Providing staff development in all aspects of the RPL process across the institution. This would facilitate a change in culture and attitude towards the value and process of RPL and create internal drivers of both policy and practice.
3. Establishing methods of tracking and monitoring RPL students that can be consolidated across the institution.

Clearly, further research is required on how RPL practices can be designed to fit the South African context, and the resources (monetary or otherwise) required to make RPL more viable. HEIs also need to enter the RPL arena and begin to give RPL the attention it deserves.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The previous chapter outlined the review of literature related to the legislative framework and objectives of RPL as instigated by SAQA and the National Department of Education, the socio-political and economic needs that support these national objectives of 'redress and access', as well as national and international experiences of RPL.

This chapter presents the research design and methodology that underpins my study. It provides a rationale for the choice of research approach and the related tools that underpin this study. Firstly, I discuss various philosophies of education, highlighting where my philosophy of education lies. Secondly, I consider ontological and epistemological perspectives, concluding with the research methodology that suits this study. Thirdly, I cite the methods and techniques (taking into account validity and reliability) that were used in this study. Finally, I discuss the ethical considerations of this research report, and demonstrate how I plan to disseminate the research findings.

The specific research questions that frame this study are as follows:

1. Since 2000, how many students in the Faculty of M&C have been successfully awarded recognition (either access or credit) of prior learning acquired in the workplace? What trends can be attributed to the numbers identified and the recognition awarded?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, tools, processes and procedures that were applied when admitting students through the RPL process?
3. What have been the experiences, successes and challenges of both students and academics involved in the RPL process?

3.1 Philosophies of Education

> Philosophy and education are intertwined with each other and with the cultural values of our society. Each reciprocally influences and is in turn influenced by the others.
>
> (Peters et al, in Werner, 2000:1)

There are several significant philosophies assigned to adult education, but just as there exists no one philosophy, there exists no single purpose around which adult educators unite. In this chapter, I shall consider the various adult education philosophies and consider where my philosophical approach to education and research lies. I shall also present here the particular research approach, methods and techniques that befit my philosophy and study.

Merriam and Brocket (1997) categorise various western philosophical perspectives in rough chronological order: liberal-progressive, behaviourist-humanist, and most recently, the radical perspective. For the purposes of this paper, I have arranged the philosophies using Merriam and Brocket's categorisation.

Liberal philosophy of education goes back to the ancient Greeks where education was undertaken for its own sake; its purpose is to develop intellectual powers of the mind. Few universities today provide only a traditional liberal education, though curricula often contain liberal studies.

Progressive education expresses its purpose as promoting social change, the emphasis being on the learner's needs and the focus of delivery changing from the teacher as 'expert' to the teacher as 'facilitator'. Progressive education was influenced by American pragmatism, specifically by the educational philosophy of Dewey in the early 20th century, which laid the groundwork for a philosophy that considered the learner's experience as the most valuable part of education (Michelson, 1999).

Behaviourism is a psychological theory that argues that adults are conditioned to behave in certain ways and that the environment can be manipulated to alter behaviour. The role of the teacher is as 'manager'.

Two leading humanists, Maslow and Rogers, see education as a way to assist individuals to become fully autonomous and self-actualised, the humanist philosophy, therefore, has as its purpose personal growth and development. Malcolm Knowles, a prominent adult educator, is a strong advocate of humanism:

> As individuals mature, their need and capacity to be self-directing, to use their experience in learning, to identify their own readiness to learn, and to organise their learning around life problems, increases steadily from infancy to preadolescence, and then increases rapidly during adolescence.
>
> (1998:62)

Knowles' theory of andragogy, the art and science of teaching adults, values self direction and autonomy. The primary focus, then, of the teacher is to facilitate the learning process by selecting appropriate learning experiences and encouraging application of the content.

As Werner (2000:6) states:

> The humanistic approach has become an important part of adult basic education programmes to improve the poor self-concepts of many adult learners who have not been successful in previous education systems.

Radical philosophy has its purpose in bringing about, through education, radical, social, political and economic changes in society. Paulo Freire, an icon of this movement, emphasises the use of adult education to bring about changes in society, politics and the economy. The role of the teacher here is of co-ordinator and instigator, who suggests but does not determine the direction of learning.

The driving force of UFH, through its leadership, its students and its programmes, has been one of freedom and transformation; a role it has played since the inception of *apartheid*. The Faculty of M&C has, in addition to the traditional undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, worked with civil society and governments in transformational governance and developmental initiatives. Many programmes within the Faculty of M&C are espoused to progressive-radical traditions, seeking socio-cultural and economic betterment of civil society in the Eastern Cape and beyond.

My philosophy of education is located in the humanist-progressive approaches, recognising that the motivation for developing one's full learning potential is inherent in each of us. And reaching that full potential, I believe, would *directly* influence society and change. It is this theoretical framework that will inform my research study.

Models of RPL draw particularly heavily on humanistic and progressive traditions with the central aims of increasing confidence and self-worth; maximising individual educational potential and democratising traditional education and institutional practices. There has been little influence of the radical philosophy in RPL, a concern if its goal in South Africa is the transformation of the education landscape. As Harris (1997:7) warns, 'the fact that a rhetorical radical voice echoed across the field of RPL suggests a somewhat romanticised vision of the concept's potential as a vehicle for social change.'

Humanism is not without its critics. Fundamentalists on the religious-right consider humanism to be contrary to the basic tenets of theological orientations, though there is little in the literature that calls for such abandonment. Another argument is that humanism is about 'self' (a selfish concern) and therefore not concerned with society at large. A reflection of how humanists view the relationship between individual and society was made by Lindeman in 1926:

> Adult education will become an agency of progress if its short-term goal of self-improvement can be made compatible with a long-time, experiential but resolute policy of changing the social order.
>
> (in Hiemstra and Brockett, 1994:5)

3.2 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

Bradley (1993:432) argues that the methodology selected for a research study develops from the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance:

> …the internal rationale of qualitative research traditions as methodological issues and practices arise from assumptions about reality and what we can know about it.

Ontological assumptions concern the very essence of being. Cohen and Manion (1994:6) pose the question, 'is social reality external to individuals – imposing itself on their consciousness from without – or is it the product of individual cognition?'

Epistemological assumptions concern the very bases of knowledge. Cohen and Manion (1994:6) question whether:

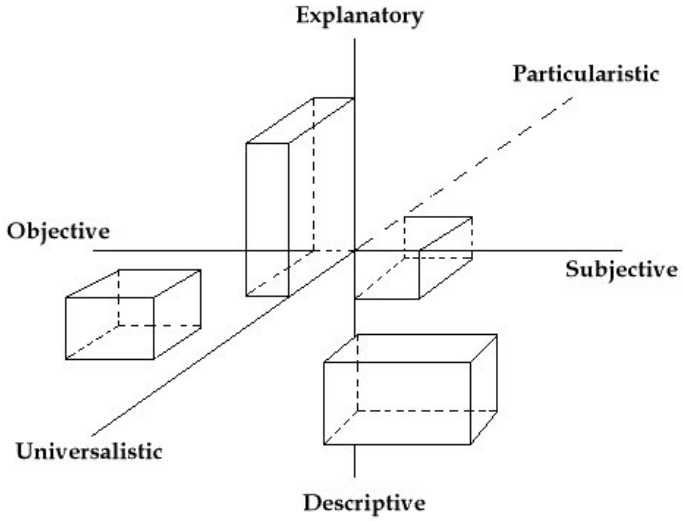
> …it is possible to identify the nature of knowledge as being hard, real and capable of being transmitted in tangible form, or whether "knowledge" is a softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature.

These questions characterise the positivist - post-positivist debate. Logical 'positivism' subscribes to the view that knowledge is objective and tangible, and that researchers use experimental methods and quantitative measures to test hypotheses leading to generalisations. The philosophical shift from social facts as *objective* facts to the idea of facts as subjectively and socially *constructed* (anti-positivist) has come to be associated with the concept of qualitative research.

McKereghan (1998) argues that actual research does not neatly fit either the quantitative or qualitative paradigm, and that researchers should not be cornered into an 'either/or dichotomy'. Rather, she states, qualitative and quantitative research paradigms are the ideal ends of a continuum along which actual research takes place. If each aspect of research were plotted along such planes, the model of social research, she argues, would be multi-dimensional.

McKereghan (1998:3) offers such a graphic presentation of research in Figure 3.2.1 below, but stresses a fourth dimension might be symbolised by the addition of colour shading and another by the use of texture. In other words, the complexity and variation of the qualitative/quantitative paradigm is limited by our ability to visualise a number of dimensions.

Figure 3.2.1: Qualitative/Quantitative Paradigm



McKereghan's sentiment echoes that of an earlier writer, the leading American psychologist, Lee Cronbach (1975), who stated that:

> The special task of the social scientist in each generation is to pin down the contemporary facts. Beyond that, he shares with the

> humanistic scholar and the artist in the effort to gain insight into contemporary relationships.
>
> (in Hoepfl, 1997:2)

I believe facts exist. However, statistical research is not able to take full account of the many interactions and relationships that take place in social settings, especially outcomes and relationships that may be important but not statistically significant. With reference to my research questions, facts would not appreciate or reflect experiences, emotions or circumstances of both students and academics who participated in the RPL process. Qualitative enquiry, on the other hand, recognises the complex and dynamic quality of the social world.

In light of the study area that I have chosen, and the theoretical framework of humanism that underpins the study, my research would use a more qualitative paradigm than a quantitative one (appreciating McKereghan's arguments concerning the 'either/or dichotomy').

Selecting a qualitative paradigm, which is compatible with humanistic theory, is appropriate for this research as Bogden and Bijlen (1982) observe:

> A field once dominated by measurement, operationalized definitions, variables and empirical facts has had to make room for a research approach gaining in popularity, one that emphasizes inductive analysis, description, and the study of people's perceptions.
>
> (in Worthen and Sanders, 1987:50)

The ability of a qualitative research methodology to describe more fully a phenomenon is also an important consideration for my study. Qualitative research reports, typically rich in detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, 'may be epistemologically in harmony with the readers' experience' (Stake, 1978:5).

Features of qualitative methodology are, for instance:

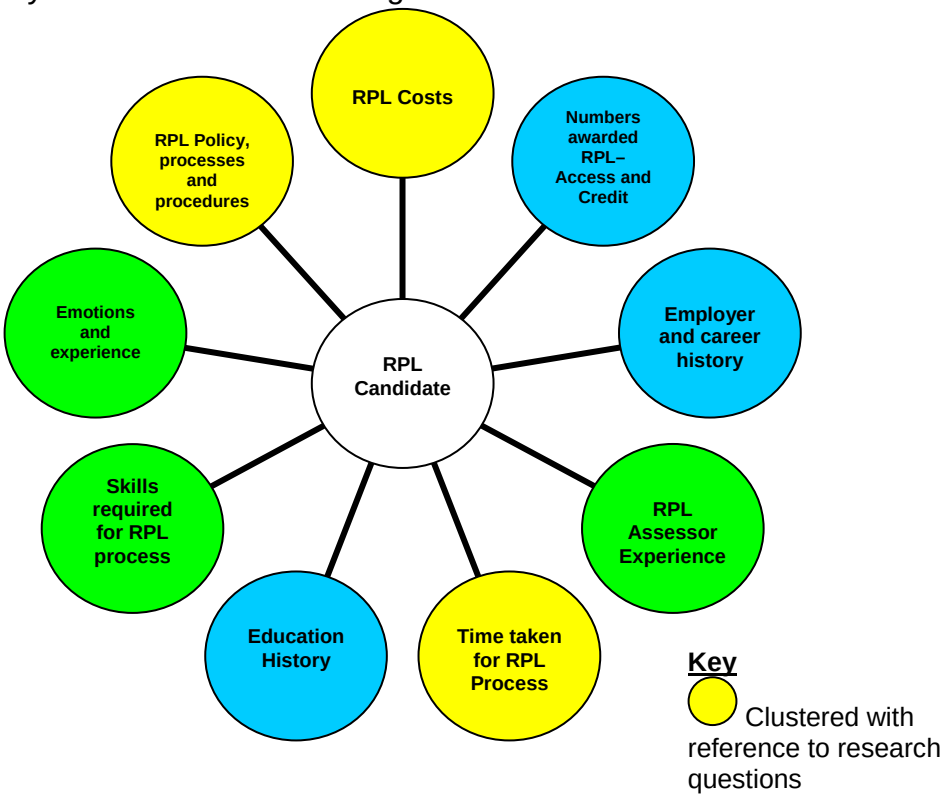
1. The researcher is the human instrument of data collection;
2. The research uses the natural setting as the source of data;
3. The research has an interpretive character.

Through applying these features in my research, I shall be exposed to the meaning events have for the individuals who experience them, and the interpretations of those meanings. These features also provide a framework for my research study.

3.3 Research Design and Method

Cronbach observed that designing a study is as much art as science. It is 'an exercise of the dramatic imagination' (in Patton, 2002:12). Mapping the various role players and information sources for the research study (see Figure 3.3.1 below) proved to be a useful exercise in determining the methods and techniques that will apply to my research.

Figure 3.3.1: Faculty of M&C: Research Design



In linking Figure 3.3.1 to my research questions, I begin here to consider more specific enquiries that I will make:

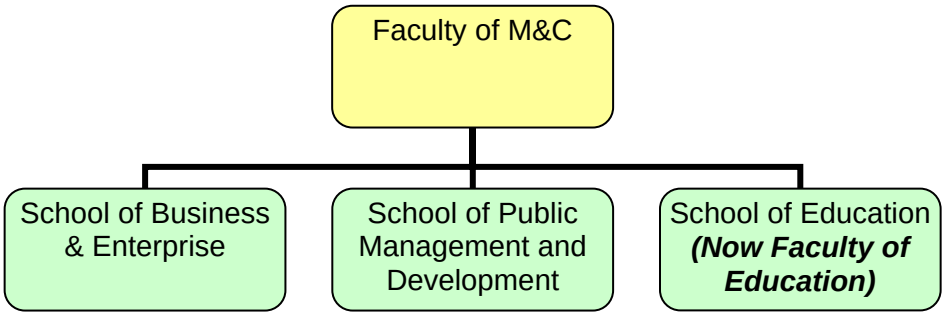
1. Since 2000, how many students in the M&C Faculty have been successfully awarded recognition (either access or credit) based on prior learning ascertained in the workplace? What trends can be attributed to the numbers identified and the recognitions awarded?
    a. How was RPL marketed?
    b. How many students applied for RPL and how many were awarded RPL?
    c. Of those awarded RPL, how many were for access and how many for credit?
    d. What was the educational history noted in the applications?
    e. What was the employment history noted in the applications?
    f. What alternative paths were provided for those who were not awarded recognition?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, tools, processes and procedures that were applied when admitting students through the RPL process?
    a. How long did the RPL process take?
    b. What costs are attributed to the RPL process?
    c. What was the institutional process for developing an RPL policy?
    d. What training in RPL was provided to academics?
    e. What was the process for developing the RPL tools and procedures?
3. What have been the experiences, successes and challenges of both students and academics involved in the recognition of prior learning process?
    a. What skills are required for facilitating the RPL process?
    b. How were students prepared for the RPL process?
    c. What tools were selected for the RPL process?
    d. Which selection criteria were used for the RPL tools utilised?

e. What successes were there from both the academics' and students' perceptions?
f. What challenges existed for both academics and students?
g. What were the students' and academics' experiences of the RPL process?
h. What recommendations would both students and academics make for improving the RPL process?

Using a qualitative research paradigm, this hermeneutic/interpretive study will adopt a case study as its research method, involving RPL candidates and staff, within the Faculty of M&C.

Considering the relationships and contexts identified in Figure 3.3.1, the research methodology lends itself to a hermeneutic/interpretive study. Hermeneutic social theory is based on understanding relations between individuals in a social context. This leads then to a methodology focusing on interpretation and detailed explanation of events as well as the context in which they take place; that is *thick* description (Geertz, 1973).

The research method proposed is a case study of the RPL process within the context of the Faculty of M&C. The structure of the Faculty[2] is as follows:



[2] The faculty structure changed in 2005 when the School of Education became the Faculty of Education, that is, after this research study began; the In-Service Programme Unit of the School of Education had already been selected to form part of this study. For the purposes of this study, the scope will remain as that determined at the end of 2004, that is the Units selected for research from the School of Public Management & Development and from the former School of Education.

As Merriam (1998:41) states: ‘case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs and for informing policy.’ A case study is an exhaustive, all encompassing description and analysis of a single experience, instance or social unit (Merriam, 1988). A case study incorporates a variety of sources of information and methods for gathering data.

Merriam (1998) argues that the strength of using a case study outweighs its limitations. Case studies can provide a large amount of detailed information; illustrate the complexities of a situation, as well as elucidate the people, their personalities and influences on that situation. The important variables or hypotheses highlighted through case studies support planning such investigations. Case studies can also assist the researcher to understand educational processes and problems.

However, case studies can generalise or amplify a situation, and as Merriam (1988:42) warns “both the readers of case studies and the authors themselves need to be aware of biases that can affect the final product.”

Peshkin (1988:17) urges researchers (using either quantitative or qualitative methodologies) to focus on these biases, in particular the researcher’s subjectivity, and be attentive to the impact on their work:

> When researchers observe themselves in the focused way that I propose, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement.

The sources of information for my research can be derived from my mapping exercise above (Figure 3.3.1):

1. RPL Candidates - these individuals form the core of the study, it is their history, aspirations and experience that are at the heart of this research study.
2. RPL Assessors – these individuals direct and mould the RPL experience of the candidate. It is their feelings, experiences and understanding that impact directly upon the process and outcomes.
3. RPL Policies and Procedures – these documents determine the institutional arrangements for RPL, and expose the processes and procedures for scrutiny.
4. RPL Records – these documents reveal the basis upon which RPL was awarded or not awarded, and the number of students awarded access or credit.

3.4 Qualitative Research Techniques

Patton (2002) considers the research techniques that are attributed to qualitative studies to be:

- In-depth open-ended interviews
- Direct observation
- Written documents.

As Patton (2002:4) states:

> *Interviews* yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge. The data from *observations* consist of detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviours, actions and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organisational processes that are part of the observable human experience. *Document analysis* includes studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and open-ended responses to questionnaires and surveys.

Merriam (1988), however, adds that case studies are not aligned to any particular methods for data collection. In fact, any or all methods can be used in a case study.

I used the following research methods:

- ***Document analysis***

  Documented RPL policies, processes and procedures were analysed. In addition, the documented applications for candidates together with their portfolios of evidence were analysed. Documents can provide much of the context in which role players are involved in the RPL system. However, these can prove useful only to the extent that they are thorough, and that the authors are available to interview so as to further interrogate the underlying assumptions and methodologies applied when developing the documents. Relevant documents gathered were referenced and submitted as part of the final report.

- ***Semi-structured Interviews***

  Eight past candidates of RPL formed the research population of this method. *Three* of the academics involved in facilitating, assessing or managing these candidates through the RPL process were selected for interview. Figure 3.3.1 above commences the process of determining the questions to be posed during the interview process.

  Unlike quantitative studies where the sampling strategy is predominantly probability sampling, the strategy for qualitative research is usually *purposeful* sampling. Purposeful sampling seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in depth (Patton, 2002).

  However, sampling errors can occur in qualitative research – there can be insufficient breadth in the sample; and distortions can occur through changes over time and lack of depth in data collection.

Two of the eight candidates selected for interview were selected using *purposeful* sampling. These candidates were on the Masters of Public Administration Programme at the Fort Hare Institute of Government, and were awarded advanced standing: one lacked formal education, and both hold senior management positions within their organisations. The remaining six were conveniently selected from the class of eleven students on the Bachelor of Education programme offered by the In Services Programme Unit located in the Faculty of Education. Two of the staff members interviewed were involved in the Bachelor of Education programme, whilst the third was involved in the Masters in Public Administration programme.

- ***Direct Observation***

  Drawing on the institutional RPL workshop planned to evaluate the pilot programme of RPL, I observed the context in which academics and administrators contributed to the outcomes sought. Comprehensive field notes were maintained.

In October 2004, a faculty RPL workshop endorsed my research proposal and academics agreed to facilitate access to candidates for interview and to all relevant documentation. With the initial introduction provided by the academics, I determined the willingness and ability of the candidates to participate in the research through direct contact with them.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Triangulation is where at least two data collection methods or two sources of information are used in the research study. Multiple methods are particularly suitable when a contentious aspect of education needs to be thoroughly evaluated. Cohen and Manion (1994:241) argue that 'triangulation can be a useful technique where a researcher is engaged in a case study, a particular example of complex phenomena.'

Cohen and Manion (1994) believe that the main advantage of triangulation is that it strengthens validity. Yet there is no consensus as to what the exact nature of validity is. Countless definitions exist for the term. A much cited definition is that of Hammersley (1987, in Winter 2000:2): 'an account is valid or true if it represents accurately those features of phenomena, that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise.'

Some qualitative researchers reject the positivist concept of validity altogether, arguing that it is not applicable to qualitative research. Yet others believe that the concept of validity has value in quantitative research. Winter (2000), for example, argues that validity is not a unitary concept, presented in a single form or construct, nor something which is capable of being located at multiple and specific stages of the research project. He believes that validity defies extrapolation, form or categorisation, within any research project, concluding that validity is a, 'contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects.' (2000:1)

In essence then, validity lies in the representation of those involved, the purposes of the research and the appropriateness of the processes involved. Since validity is not attributed to a particular process or measure within qualitative research, all that remains is how representative the description is and how justifiable the findings. This is reflective of the nature and purpose of my research study.

The practice of member checks, soliciting feedback on the data collected from the very individuals that I shall be studying, should reduce or eliminate misinterpretations within the representation of data and the analysis of the results. Also 'rich' data, that is, data that provides a comprehensive and exposing picture of what is going on should: 'counter the twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias by making it difficult for respondents to

produce data that uniformly support a mistaken conclusion' (Becker, 1970, in Maxwell, 1996:95).

Where the aggregated definition of 'validity' in qualitative research, could be that of trustworthiness or credibility, then the definition of 'reliability' could be that of replication. Qualitative researchers argue that replicating data is not possible, or even desirable, considering that research revolves around the lives, thoughts and actions of individuals. Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Hoepfl, 1997:15) argue, 'since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter.'

Qualitative researchers usually study a single or small number of settings, individuals or sites and they rarely make explicit claims about generalisation. As Cronbach (in Hoepfl, 1997:14) states, 'when we give proper weight to local conditions, any generalisation is a working hypothesis, not a conclusion.'

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The consequences of choosing, and naming, the University of Fort Hare, as the site of this research study, were considered (Brockett, 1998). Permission to stipulate the site of research, whilst undertaking to keep the respondents involved in this study anonymous, was sought and granted from the Vice Chancellor of the university.

3.7 Disseminating the Findings

The October 2004 Faculty RPL workshop reinforced support for my research study. The proposed dissemination of my findings is a report first to the Faculty, though the Faculty Board. Both the Dean of the Faculty of M&C and the Head of the Teaching and Learning Centre have been informed of this research study and have endorsed it.

4. Findings: A Case Study of the Current Practice

The academic programmes that practise RPL are the Masters of Public Administration (MPA) programme offered by the Fort Hare Institute of Government (FHIG), School of Public Management & Development in the Faculty of M&C, and the Bachelor of Education degree (BEd) programme, provided by the In-Service Programmes (ISP) Unit, in the newly formed Faculty of Education.

This chapter presents the findings of this research study. Firstly I provide an introduction to each Unit selected for this study. Secondly I consider the various RPL policies that exist in the institution, as it is these documents that govern the institutional arrangements for RPL and provide the contextual background to the study.

The remainder of the findings, under the broad headings of RPL Data and Statistics, RPL Process, and Successes and Challenges, consider the three broad research questions that framed this study, as follows:

RPL Data and Statistics:

1. Since 2000, how many students in the Faculty of M&C had been awarded recognition (either access or credit) of prior learning acquired in the workplace? What trends could be attributed to the numbers identified and the recognition awarded?

RPL Process:

2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, tools, processes and procedures that were applied when admitting students through the RPL process?

Successes and Challenges:

3. What had been the experiences, successes and challenges of both students and academics involved in the RPL process?

4.1 Fort Hare Institute of Government (FHIG)

FHIG was established in June 1995 with the specific objective of providing intellectual and professional support to the newly emerging public sector institutions of the new South Africa. FHIG was divided into four programme teams:

- Development and Training Programmes
- Academic Programmes
- Research, Policy Advice and Consultancy
- Support Programmes.

The MPA programme had its first intake of 50 students in 2003. The two year programme is offered on a part-time block release basis. Most of the students registered on the programme derived from the Eastern Cape Provincial Government, the same student base as PFSA. With its longstanding experience in the public sector, choosing FHIG to be part of the study provided valuable insight into public sector officials who sought RPL, and their experiences of the RPL process.

4.2 The In-Service Programme Unit (ISP)

The ISP unit was established in 1997, in partnership with the Eastern Cape Department of Education, Teacher Organisations and other interested bodies. Through a flexible delivery system, which would increase the accessibility and reach of education, ISP aimed to offer the thousands of unqualified and under qualified educators in the province an opportunity to upgrade their professional qualifications

ISP has 20 functioning learning centres divided into 5 regions, covering the whole of the Eastern Cape Province. Over 1 500 educators were enrolled in its BEd programme. Developed in collaboration with overseas partners from the Open University in the UK, and the University of South Australia, the programme has been praised for its engaging and innovative materials, its

interactive and practice-based approach and mode of delivery, and the insight that it gives teachers into the key principles of the new curriculum.

There were several reasons for selecting the BEd programme to be part of the study:

- The drive for RPL was initiated at a national government level
- The partners of the ISP Unit included the Open University, UK, one of the early pioneers of RPL
- The support structure established by ISP extended throughout the Eastern Cape Province, through its learning centres.

4.3 RPL Policies

The first attempt at presenting an institutional RPL policy to Senate (the governing body of the university) was made in 2003 by the Quality Management & Assurance Unit of the University; at the same time FHIG presented its own RPL policy.

The resolution of Senate was that the FHIG RPL policy would be endorsed as a pilot programme for the academic year 2004 and that an evaluation of the programme should be undertaken, and a revised institutional policy prepared and presented.

At a faculty workshop held in September 2004 it was agreed that my research was relevant to the evaluation of the FHIG RPL policy and that my findings would inform the revised institutional policy.

4.3.1 FHIG RPL Policy

The FHIG RPL policy (see Appendix 1) was developed as a response to the needs of learners already involved in their training programmes, as the following response reveals:

> *Margaret[3]: The background is such that FHIG has traditionally been a training institute and with the introduction of academic programmes, and in our case, a post graduate programme, some of the learners were not so keen with just training. They wanted something more, but they didn't fit, if you know what I mean?*

Having secured the status of the pilot programme, the challenge of putting policy into practice then presented itself to FHIG. There appears to have been no strategic or detailed action plan to put policy into practice. Indeed, implementing the policy remained within the narrow confines of FHIG, no sharing or learning took place within the broader context of the school or faculty. An opportunity to include more academics and faculty central resources was missed.

Though Senate endorsed the pilot programme no additional resources were allocated to support this initiative, and this impacted on some areas of the policy which required investment, for example, the FHIG Policy (Appendix 1:8) makes mention of training and development for all staff involved in the area of RPL assessment. This did not take place.

The FHIG policy (Appendix 1:11), stated that RPL practice would be monitored closely and the procedures would be reviewed at the end of the year and subsequently every three years. Once again there was no plan of how this review would be undertaken, by whom and when. Determining a process of review from the outset may have resulted in an opportunity to involve the RPL candidates, other academics and institutional support service staff in the evaluation.

Such an evaluation team might have highlighted early on ambiguous aspects of the policy itself. For example, although the policy gives examples of a number of RPL assessment methods (Appendix 1: 9-10) the Roll-Out Plan (Appendix 1:11) only provides guidance on one method - the *portfolio of evidence*.

[3] The names of all respondents have been changed; random first names have been assigned.

4.3.2 ISP Policy

In January 2005 the In Service Programmes Unit presented an RPL policy specific to its BEd Programme (see Appendix 2); Senate endorsed the policy. The policy was a response to the Government Gazette 935 (2000: 14) which states:

> Learners entering a 480 [credit] Bachelor of Education degree from an old three-year Diploma in Education will be required to study an additional 240 credits to complete the 480 Bachelor of Education degree. The institution may credit the student through the Recognition of Prior Learning and/or school experience up to a maximum of 120 credits.

This policy is very specific and relates to one programme only.

The ISP Policy prescribes explicit assessment methods that will be used and allocates credits to each. The policy also stipulates exactly how support should be provided to candidates, the roles of academics involved in the process, who would form the moderation panel, and how the faculty would be involved.

Interestingly, both programmes entered into RPL from different perspectives: a demand-led drive by trainees already in the FHIG system of short courses, and a national supply-led drive by the National Department of Education as part of its 'upgrading of educators' initiative.

4.3.3 New Draft Institutional RPL Policy

During 2005 the baton of establishing an institutional RPL policy was passed from the Quality Management Assurance Unit to the Teaching and Learning Centre. This has confused stakeholders as to whose responsibility it is to establish policy and implement it.

In April 2005 the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), which had secured some external funding, hosted a two-day RPL workshop. The aim of the

workshop was documented at the front of the pack each participant received: To critically evaluate the FHIG RPL Policy (2003) with a view to finalising a draft UFH RPL Policy.

All of the faculties were well represented and, in addition, there was representation from core services such as the Quality Management and Assurance Unit and Student Counselling. An external consultant, experienced in the field of RPL, was brought in to facilitate the workshop.

On the one hand the workshop was not a success, because the prescribed outcome was not reached. It was the first time that the majority of the participants interacted with FHIG policy. More significantly, I observed a wide disparity among participants in terms of their understanding of RPL. There seemed uncertainty as to how they felt RPL could benefit their programmes; and they doubted their experience and ability to assist in drafting an institutional policy.

For some it was the first time they had heard of RPL, for others, like the ISP and FHIG academics, the workshop did not go to the depth that they desired, as the following quotation demonstrates:

> Lisa: I felt that, you know I enjoyed it very much. I felt that it was very well run. Um, I'm not sure that I learnt a lot that was new.
> Jay: Okay. What were your expectations of that workshop? What were you hoping to leave with?
> Lisa: Um, I suppose I was hoping to just extend my understanding of RPL, er because I just felt that the work that we do, speaking as somebody who is part of the In-service programme, um is always going to need to take prior learning into account. I just felt that we as the in-service programme section needed to really get on top of RPL, and that is what I was hoping for, to really get on top of the thing.

The only tangible outcome achieved in the workshop was to list the areas which institutional policy needed to address. A task team of four[4] was established to meet at a later date and actually write the institutional policy (see Appendix 3).

On the other hand, I observed that the workshop achieved something by enabling a wider audience of the university to begin to discuss, challenge and reflect on RPL within the confines of their faculty and its programmes.

The facilitator had very definite ideas about RPL in the higher education arena. Having announced that some time ago I had been awarded block credit through RPL, and the assessment method used was an interview, the facilitator's response[5] to me (in front of all the participants) was: 'with all due respect, I think that an interview is not sufficient enough for RPL. I would definitely not use this method. Documentation demonstrating learning is much better.' Such a definite statement by the facilitator only served to limit further investigation and consideration by the participants into this method of assessment.

The task team meeting which followed was much more productive. We had brought along research that we had undertaken relevant to the policy. I discovered that several more HEIs had devised RPL policies during 2004, many of which were accessible on the internet. These provided a good frame of reference for the task team.

In addition, one province of South Africa had taken the bold step of establishing a provincial RPL centre that would service the three institutions of higher learning situated there. Interestingly, the three institutions are quite distinct in

[4] The task team comprised of a representative from the Registrar's office, the head of the Teaching and Learning Centre, the head of the Quality and Management Assurance Unit, and myself.

[5] I decided not to engage the facilitator further, though I felt rebuked by her remark. I was in the unique position of being internally involved in the workshop and externally observing the participants; I did not want to jeopardise that position.

their programme offerings and so there would be little competition for the students; unlike the position in my province.

The revised institutional policy, developed by the task team, was presented to Senate in August 2005. The evaluation of the FHIG and ISP policies and the process of developing the revised institutional policy provide a contextual background of RPL. No further investigation into the revised policy was undertaken as this was beyond the scope of the study.

4.4 RPL Data and Statistics

In order to determine how many students in the Faculty of M&C had been successfully awarded recognition (either access or credit) for prior learning acquired in the workplace, and what trends could be attributed to the numbers identified and the recognition awarded, a request was made to the Faculty Manager for any data or statistics on candidates being awarded RPL for any programme within the faculty.

His response[6] was as follows, 'I do not think the Faculty have RPLed any candidates this year, however, I am not sure for the MPA programmes.'

Ideally the Faculty Manger would be able to access data from the institutional student data system, which would provide him with all assessment results (including RPL). In fact, the current institutional student data system (version 12), an off-the-shelf data package that is widely used amongst institutions of higher learning, is not capable of capturing RPL assessment results. The new version 13, to which the institution will shortly be upgrading, will be able to capture RPL data.

In meeting the academics involved with RPL in FHIG, I requested data regarding the number of people who had indicated interest in pursuing the RPL

[6] Email response dated 14th March 2005

route as well as information on RPL processes and procedures. The academics were unable to provide the information as this was not recorded. They were able to state that there had been several enquiries but these candidates had not progressed to the next stages of the process.

Without data such as their name, or contact details having been captured, I was unable to interview these potential RPL candidates to ascertain what had been, and perhaps still are, the root cause(s) of their inability to continue with the process.

With access to completed application forms and assessments, I ascertained that FHIG awarded RPL for advanced status to four (4) candidates, three in 2004 and one in 2005. The ISP Unit awarded one hundred and twenty-one (121) candidates block credit in 2005.

4.5 RPL Process

In considering the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, tools, processes and procedures that were applied when admitting students through the RPL process, I have segregated the findings into the following activities, and, where relevant, I have provided insights from two perspectives, the candidate perspective and the academic perspective.

- Enquiries about RPL
- Application and Fees
- Methods of Assessing RPL
- Assessment and Moderation of RPL Evidence
- Communication of Results.

4.5.1 Enquiries about RPL

There was no faculty strategy for advertising RPL, although the faculty prospectus on the MPA programme contained a paragraph about RPL.

Candidates had either approached the programme co-ordinators directly or their organisations had done so on their behalf.

Candidate perspective

One candidate spoke intently about his struggle to find a programme that would accept his 'non-formal' education background. He explained that he had first heard of RPL on visit to the UK and had applied there. He was accepted but the fees were not affordable, and so he then approached another institution in South Africa:

> Gary: And this placed a burden on me to try and look for an alternative within the country. I then did some enquiries at X University and the process of registration seemed so involved that it was a discouragement. Um, in fact to the extent that it would almost be an embarrassment, you feel like they are really going to embarrass you.
> Jay: Really
> Gary: Yah, by doing that. It's like putting a victim of crime on the stand. So I really felt that I was being 'undressed' by the questions that were in that application. They were intimidating… I blame higher education institutions. Universities are doing the same as large white companies and BEE[7]. RPL is a nice to have. They are not committed. People should not go through the same emotional struggle I went through trying to find a university to accept me.

Five out of the six candidates interviewed on the BEd programme had explained that it was through colleagues at work, siblings or friends that they had received information regarding the programme and its RPL process.

> Jay: Do you think that had your friend not told you about this course, there is another way you would have discovered this course?
> Sam: I think that if I didn't have the friends, this course would not have been known by me, that is why I am here. They help me, that is why I am here.

[7] BEE stands for Black Economic Empowerment; a national government-supported initiative to increase participation of the black majority in the economy that has been dominated by the white minority.

Academic perspective

Academics interviewed had reservations about actively advertising RPL. They felt that without a formal RPL structure in place, which was adequately resourced, and which could respond to the potential explosion of interest, applicants could be discouraged by inefficient processes. Academics were also concerned about a growth in their workloads.

Academics interviewed also raised the issue of quality and integrity, and the perception that a large number of RPL candidates on their programme would discourage candidates entering the institution through the traditional application route.

> Margaret: I have, should I say, not concerns but a few reservations. Especially as it does affect how the programme is interpreted. Whether you like it or not, look at the MBA programmes[8], for instance. The MBA programmes that took in candidates without the SAQA whatever, some of them were scrapped because they said the students were not up to scratch. It has quality implications for the university.

The process of enquiry also was a burden to academics involved in the activity. Enquiry meant spending time with the applicant and explaining RPL, and then supporting them through the application process. The academics pointed out that they were not recognised or rewarded for undertaking this additional work.

4.5.2 Application and Fees

The programmes had distinct procedures to deal with applications and fees.

There was no specific application form devised for the MPA programme. The academics involved used the normal post-graduate application forms, which do not allow for submission of non-formal or experiential learning. Thus RPL candidates were only able to complete their personal details, the rest of the

[8] This is the reference to the 2004 Higher Education Quality Committee audit of MBA programmes across all HEIs that offered the programme. The outcome of the audit was that some institutions lost their SAQA accreditation status. University of Fort Hare was not subject to the audit.

form which involved details of formal study and the sections marked ‘for office use’ remained blank.

The candidates interviewed raised no concerns about the fees. The RPL fee for the MPA programme was R1250, calculated at twenty-five percent of the annual study fee. Candidates on the BEd programme paid R500 for RPL. Academics interviewed were not able to explain the basis for the calculation of the fee. The academics involved were cognisant that fees needed to be affordable but reiterated that fees did not reflect the true cost of the time and resources that was actually incurred.

4.5.3 Methods of Assessing RPL

The MPA programme used a *portfolio of evidence* as its sole RPL assessment method. Three of the candidates participated in a four-day *portfolio of evidence* development workshop. The aim of the workshop was to equip candidates with the skills necessary for the compilation and assessment of the *portfolio of evidence*. Academics attended the assessment component of the workshop.

The fourth candidate was given no induction and in his submission, made reference to the time restrictions and the way this impacted on his preparation and research.

To prepare their *portfolio of evidence* the four candidates were given the exit level outcomes and recommended readings for four modules:

1. Organisational Theory
2. Local Government and Administration
3. Advanced Public Financial Management
4. Human Resource Management

The first two modules are from the final year of the Bachelor of Public Administration (BPA), whilst the latter two are from the BPA Honours programme.

There do not appear to be any other guidelines provided to the candidates in terms of preparing their portfolios. There is also no evidence that the curriculum of the BPA embraced knowledge acquired outside the formal education setting. In reviewing the *portfolios of evidence* submitted by the four candidates, I noted that they made little or no reference to relevant prior learning or achievements as a result of previously acquired skills or knowledge. Their submissions were not rooted in personal encounters or anecdotes, rather they appeared detached from any subjectivity, emotion or self-interest.

For example, in one *portfolio of evidence*, a candidate who was responding to the exit level outcomes for the Human Resource Management module, began by defining what human resource management was. The candidate then discussed the functions of planning, recruitment, selection, induction, employee benefits, remuneration management and performance management. The only reference to any personal experience and learning was made in the last two paragraphs on the last section of performance management:

> As of my own reflection on this particular important topic, I must emphasise this point simply because of encounter I have passed…it has never been an easy exercise when changing responsibilities at leadership or managerial position.

The candidate does not elaborate on this reflection, nor provide any examples to support the statement made.

It is not easily apparent what continuous support the candidates received during their portfolio development process. This is highlighted in one candidate's *portfolio of evidence* where, in the opening statement relating to the

module theme of 'organisational communication climate', the candidate began by defining climate in reference to the weather.[9]

The BEd programme used a combination of a portfolio of evidence and interview as the RPL assessment methods.

The BEd programme provided the candidates with detailed guidelines of what was required in terms of building evidence for their portfolios. The relevant module study guides were provided to each candidate. The evidence required included assignments, journal records and classroom-based activities supported by learners' work.

Continuous support was provided by Centre Leaders[10] who met with the candidates fortnightly on a Saturday, for approximately four to five hours.

4.5.4 Assessment and Moderation of RPL Evidence

The programmes had different approaches to RPL assessment and moderation, as well as capacity building of resources and staff.

The MPA Programme had selected an assessor and a panel of moderators from within the faculty's school structures; a definite segregation of duties. The assessor was contracted and paid for services rendered, that is, for assessing *portfolios of evidence*. The assessor had not received any training on RPL assessment. Three of the moderating panel had attended RPL workshops hosted externally.

[9] An extract from the portfolio reads, 'To begin with the physical climate consists of the generally prevailing weather conditions of an area. The physical climate is a composite of temperature, air pressure, humidity, precipitation, sunshine, cloudiness and winds throughout the year.'

[10] Centre leaders were located throughout the province using various venues such as university facilities, and school or church halls for meeting the candidates.

The MPA RPL assessment report [see Appendix 4] reported on two portfolios submitted, though it was written as one report. The report made no reference to particular aspects of the individual submissions that corroborated the decision of the assessor.

The assessment report also surmised that the knowledge demonstrated in the portfolios articulated with two modules whose exit level outcomes were not provided to applicants in the first instance. No specific reference to these was made by the candidates in the evidence they provided.

In the BEd programme the assessors were Centre Leaders, who also provided portfolio development support to the candidates. The Centre Leaders had all attended a two-day workshop facilitated by the academic co-ordinators of the programme.

The moderation of the BEd *portfolio of evidence* was undertaken by a panel, made up of academic co-ordinators, educators from the provincial Department of Education and academic staff from other HEIs. The moderation process included an interview with each candidate, where they were required to 'defend' their portfolios.

Candidates felt that the composition of the moderation panel was contrived, involving both external educators and academic staff from other HEIs. It seemed that the academics sought external validation of their RPL process. However, the academics involved explained that some institutions simply accepted candidates on application, taking their years of work experience as sufficient knowledge. The ISP Unit was attempting to develop a more rigorous and thorough RPL process, and to share emerging good practice with academics from other institutions.

4.5.5 Communication of Results

Communication of results varied between the programmes. There was no evidence of formal communication of results to candidates on the MPA programme. One candidate had started to attend lectures on the programme whilst awaiting results:

> Jay: So then from the time when you submitted your document, do you remember how long you had to wait before you got any feedback?
> Gary: I can't remember exactly how long it was but I don't think it was that long, but I also made a lot of assumptions. I came to the University and I went to lectures.
> Jay: So you started attending?
> Gary: I took it as a given that they would kick me out of the class if I'm not part of this.

4.6 Success and Challenges: The Academic Perspective

The overarching success noted by the academics involved in both the MPA and the BEd programme was that they were indeed practising RPL. There was a sense that this should be celebrated, not only by their immediate peers and superiors, but across the institution. Academics emphasised that the candidates who had been awarded RPL were all doing as well in their studies as students admitted under the normal procedures.

All of the academics acknowledged their own initial apprehensions when first engaging with RPL, and the impact their involvement with RPL had in changing their perceptions:

> Margaret: Well, um I must be frank. I was not pro-RPL initially, it was strange for me also, you know. Like, why just get somebody and put them into a Masters programme? How does that work?

The challenges noted by the MPA academics were first and foremost, time. For the academics involved in the process, the time spent on responding to enquiries about RPL, or requests for assistance from RPL candidates, was in addition to their normal workload. This was not formally recognised or

rewarded. One academic felt that because of this, she would have to reduce her participation in RPL.

Resources were another challenge. The costs of hosting the MPA portfolio development workshop, and undertaking the moderation of the BEd RPL candidates were high. Academics had ideas on how RPL could be improved in their programmes, such as RPL guide books or a centralised RPL Unit, but did not have the resources to make them a reality.

Academics acknowledged that better information systems should be put in place to capture RPL data.

Another challenging aspect of RPL for academics was the lack of support from their peers as well as the senior executive of the university. They felt that RPL in the institution had taken a 'bottom-up' approach. For RPL to be institutionalised there would need to be a 'top-down' commitment and approach from the senior executive.

Academics feared that students entering through the conventional streams would perceive RPL candidates as lacking quality and in turn challenge the integrity of their programmes. This fear was not based on any concrete experience, but they were adamant that without a holistic approach to RPL, involving all of the relevant structures of the university, the fear was justified.

Reflecting on their participation in the RPL process, all felt personal satisfaction from being part of the process. As one academic concluded:

> Margaret: There are examples where you think, this is just so beautiful. And the self confidence it gives them, you can't begin to imagine.

4.7 Success and Challenges: The Candidate Perspective

The greatest success noted by all of the candidates interviewed was their acceptance into the programme they were applying for. Most noted pride and affirmation of self worth through being selected, but also of entering an institution of higher education.

> Jay: Was it difficult for you to come to the university as a student?
> Tracey: Yes, because all the time I thought I have no brains for this.
> Jay: So you are proving yourself wrong?
> Tracey: Yes

Most of the candidates also boasted of the effects this had had on family and friends. They felt more respected in their communities. The mothers interviewed noted the effect this had had on their children, whom they felt now had a greater interest in higher education studies:

> Jay: How did you feel about coming to Fort Hare? Coming to a university, did that concern you?
> Elsie: Eh! I feel very happy, because it is a great honour to be in a university, you know? [Laughter] Even to my kids, I am like 'you know I am at university'. It's very great.

The MPA candidates praised their lecturers and peers on the programme for not treating them differently. They did not feel marginalised. They also spoke about keeping up with their peers in terms of academic achievement.

> Jay: Regarding the lecturers, they are not treating you any differently?
> John: No, maybe there is something I am not doing, but in assignments we are doing I am also performing well, better than my colleagues. I am just like everyone else.

> Jay: Now that you have embarked on your studies, do you feel you would have benefited from other support, being new to formal education?
> Gary: I have not been treated differently, and there has always been an atmosphere where I feel that if I needed additional support, then I could have asked. I appreciate being left alone, and I think this is important for a Masters level. I did fear that everyone knew I

> was an RPL candidate and I do not make it, but fortunately I have done well.

One RPL candidate on the MPA programme spoke of how the MPA programme played an important role in other personal successes:

> Jay: How are you finding the Masters programme, having not been exposed to formal education – has that hindered you?
> Gary: No, actually when I started I was intimidated. I wrote a book to get myself into the writing[11].

As working adults, candidates spoke of how much their courses had impacted their personal and professional development, through, amongst others, new ways of thinking, and valuing relationships.

> Jay: What do you like about this course?
> Tracey: It is broadened my mind, it err teaches me new methods of teaching, it involves parents as well as children, it promotes quality schools.

> Gary: Now, I walked into the Masters thinking I need a piece of paper, as everyone says you're okay practically, but you need this piece of paper. So my whole thinking was of this piece of paper. But I spoke to Margaret and I was saying to her that at the end of the programme I realised that I actually learnt a hell of a lot, I've learnt a lot. It does transform your thinking. It really moulds you.

The main challenge that most candidates identified was finding out about RPL as an access route to the programme. In particular they noted the lack of advertising or promotional material that they could access.

As mentioned above, candidates also spoke of time as a challenge: time to complete their *portfolios of evidence*; the time taken to receive results; and generally the time they had to find, as working adults, for their studies.

[11] The candidate has since published a further three books, two relating to the business sector and two of which are personal reflections on life during the *apartheid* era and maintaining marital relationships.

I asked candidates what they felt about the assessment method (predominately *portfolios of evidence*) that had been used to assess their prior learning. The BEd students had no objection. They felt that their portfolios contained variety: assignments, personal reflections and evidence of learning together with an interview. The MPA candidates, however, felt that more than one method of assessment should be used. They felt that for some aspects of their portfolio, suitable methods, such as a test or interview, could have been used.

I also referred candidates to the transformational agenda associated with RPL, and asked why they felt there had been no 'big bang' reaction to RPL, both from an institutional perspective of promoting RPL as well as a groundswell support from the general public:

> Gary: RPL is not going to work in South Africa. It is still exclusionist, elitist and I can see universities cherry pick those who would get through. It's not fair. Also the work required for RPL means that you could be burnt out before you start the course.[12]

Gary's comment about being 'burnt out' was particular to his circumstance. He was afforded little time to complete the *portfolio of evidence*, as the course he was applying for was about to begin. However, his point should not be overlooked. The perceptions of RPL candidates are an important aspect of RPL which has often been disregarded. This was the first opportunity for UFH candidates to provide feedback on their experiences of the RPL process.

4.8 RPL Assessment beyond the Application Process

The BEd programme, delivered through distance education, used the portfolio of evidence (containing assignments, journal reflection and samples of learners' work) and interviews as modes of assessment for every year of the programme.

[12] The SAQA RPL Policy Document (2002b) discusses the unfairness of institutions which make the RPL assessment too rigorous, requiring too much evidence.

I reflected on an earlier conversation with the Head of the Accounting Department in my faculty. We were discussing the numerous civil servants that were working in finance but had no formal finance education. They were however, skilled in the practical applications of accounting.

She made a remark that in the first two years of the Bachelor in Commerce in Accounting, the focus was on the theoretical aspects of the subject. It was in the latter years that the focus changed to practical application. What these civil servants needed, she said, was to attend classes for the first two years of theory, as they could demonstrate the practical application of knowledge. She remarked that it seemed ridiculous that these candidates required foundational learning, traditionally supplied in the earlier part of the degree programme. She also wondered how RPL candidates would feel about this.

Considering both the BEd interview comments and this conversation with the Head of the Accounting Department, the question in my mind is, why not use RPL to assess competence in the learning offered in the latter years of the degree programme? Why not market the programme as such? Why have we confined our views of RPL to be something that occurs at the beginning of the relationship between candidate and institution and not considered RPL as something that could occur during the relationship?

This chapter provided a contextual background to FHIG and ISP, the units involved in the case study, outlining their different approaches and practices to RPL, and through probing into the academics' and candidates' views has raised new insights and questions regarding RPL. The next chapter, Chapter Five, summarises the study and forms conclusions and recommendations.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter summarises the research findings, and presents conclusions and recommendations. First I present an overall perspective of RPL in the institution. Secondly I address the research questions posed in this study and provide conclusions and recommendations under the broad headings of RPL Data and Statistics, RPL Process, and Successes and Challenges. Finally I present the overall conclusion and way forward.

5.1 RPL in the University of Fort Hare

RPL is a legal requirement yet there has been only a limited application of RPL, in other words, RPL has not been institutionalised.

Without a specific unit or individual responsible for RPL, with access to all faculties, and without investment, in the first instance, in marketing and communication within the institution, there has been no significant change since the research findings of Breier and Burness (2003), which revealed that the onus of initiating and implementing the RPL process had been left primarily to faculties.

Institutional workshops held in April 2005 highlighted the fact that not enough debate or discussion on RPL had been instigated, both within the faculty of M&C, and across the institution. If academic staff are unsure of what RPL is and how it can be applied in their programmes, one could surmise that current students and potential students have even less understanding. This supports the findings of Merrifield et al (2000) in the UK, who found that RPL was not widely known about or understood.

An opportunity to involve faculty of M&C academics and other key stakeholders in the implementation of the RPL policy developed by FHIG, and its subsequent review, was missed. Indeed, academics within the faculty could have served

as observers to the FHIG process, and, during 2004, as a parallel initiative, begun to evaluate the prospects for RPL in their own programmes.

RPL was taken up as an initiative of a few individuals, both within FHIG and the ISP Unit, as Prinsloo and Buchler (2002) found in New Zealand. Yet, even this instance of RPL within the Faculty of M&C has been inconsistent and has not created common understandings, processes and procedures, or achieved economies of scale.

The university needs to embark on a process of institutionalising RPL, not just for the sake of compliance, but to explore the transformational potential of RPL. Academic staff are not inspired to promote RPL because of the impact it has on their workloads, and the costs associated with preparing and supporting RPL candidates through the RPL process.

The findings of this study show the discrepancies in candidate numbers and their orientation to RPL in the faculty. The fact that RPL on the BEd programme was part of a national government initiative, coupled with the network of support centres established throughout the Province by the ISP unit, providing the necessary outreach support and access, resulted in high candidate numbers. The MPA programme, on the other hand, responded to the demand of individual candidates approaching the institution for RPL. There is a danger that RPL will be confined to limited numbers as a result of poor institutional *will*, unless more supply-driven government initiatives can be instigated.

If SAQA (2002b) sees RPL as a transformation strategy in higher education, then it needs to provide incentives to institutions to achieve this. There is huge potential for RPL in the institution. The financial skills profiling that I was involved in, both in 2003 and 2004, demonstrated that there is a significant number of working adults, particularly within the sphere of Government, whose

life and work experiences could provide them access to and credit within learning programmes within the faculty. SAQA and the national Department of Education should acknowledge this potential cohort of students, and provide incentives to institutions in order to establish formal structures and systems of RPL, and remove subsidy penalties.

The institution requires a Co-ordinator for RPL who should work across faculties and support services. The Co-ordinator would in the first instance embark on marketing RPL policy across the institution, providing a platform for debate and discussion.

5.2 RPL Data and Statistics

Since 2002, SAQA has provided guidelines and tools to assist with the implementation of RPL. However, no funding has been provided to institutions either to implement RPL or to support the transformational agenda attributed to RPL.

Without sufficient information or statistics, the institution is unable to determine the numbers of candidates who have enquired about RPL vis-à-vis the number of candidates who have completed the RPL process successfully (Osman, 2003). This is an important consideration not only for the institution but also to understand the use of RPL at a national level.

Without such information or statistics, incorrect assumptions about the progress of RPL could be made. Just as Breier and Burness (2003) found, UFH is unable to determine the total number of RPL candidates in relation to the total number of students. In other words, to what extent have policies become entrenched in institutional practice? Are the numbers significant?

As an institution UFH should begin to consider capturing information, from the point of enquiry for every RPL candidate. Higher education information

systems tend to capture outcomes only: pass or fail, competent or not competent. Without any information about RPL enquiries, and follow-up of why RPL candidates do not progress beyond the enquiry stage, it is impossible to determine if Breier's (1997) findings concerning literacy and numeracy, are still significant obstacles to RPL today.

5.3 RPL Process

5.3.1 RPL and the Curriculum

The existing curriculum of programmes has not been examined to consider the value of knowledge created outside the formal education system. RPL candidates on the MPA programme were required to demonstrate that their knowledge matched that of the learning outcomes provided. This is a rigid comparison, one that Harris (1999) refers to as the Procrustean Model.

Yet, the RPL candidates are from diverse backgrounds and their *curricula vitae* outline diverse life and work experiences, and so, as Michelson (1999) argues, they have different knowledge. There is growing support that knowledge derived from life and work experiences is of value (Kolb, 1881; Knowledge, 1998). By providing prospective RPL candidates with only the programme learning outcomes, candidates were not guided or encouraged to include relevant practical knowledge in their portfolio of evidence. As Michelson (1997b) demonstrates, portfolio-assisted RPL assessment continues to maintain conventional disciplinary organisations of knowledge.

Thus the limitation of the portfolio assessment method as used in the MPA programme was that it considered candidates' knowledge and skills only in relation to the knowledge and skills embedded in the curriculum. Yet the candidates' life experiences and the roles they currently hold in society, demonstrate otherwise. They could have enriched the curriculum (Michelson, 1997a). We are a long way from the pleas of Michelson (1997b) and Nel (2004) to make academic curricula more inclusive.

There has also been little consideration, both in research and the practice of RPL at UFH, that RPL can be more than a once-off event that occurs when a candidate first approaches an institution. An analysis of curricula might discover that RPL is more valid in the latter years of study, where practical application is a feature of the curriculum.

The Faculty of M&C should embark on an evaluation of its curriculum. The review should consider at which stages of the curriculum RPL could be applicable, and how the curriculum might be enhanced by experiential and indigenous knowledge, women's and other disadvantaged groups' knowledge and skills.

5.3.2 Support for the RPL Candidates

Practice was inconsistent in both programmes that instigated RPL. Different application forms were utilised. Some learners received support both in the form of module guidelines followed by face-to-face contact sessions. Other candidates received little information and were left to their own devices. Yet some candidates attended a workshop on RPL, in preparation for the assessment, while others were denied such interactions.

Once the institutional policy is accepted by Senate (expected at the end of 2005), there is still much work to be done to ensure consistency. Practice and procedure guidelines should be developed, together with documentation that ensure all data requirements of the institution, the ETDP SETA and any other stakeholders, for example, professional associations, are met.

As Castle and Attwood (2001) reflected in their own experiences, RPL is costly, time consuming and demanding for all those involved: the candidates, tutors, assessors and the institution itself. Academics involved in this study tendered the same sentiments. A more institutionally co-ordinated effort would ensure

not only consistency of practice, but would also create a pool of resources that could be made available to provide the support learners and staff require.

Specific role players could be identified to support faculties, in particular the academics and candidates, through the RPL process. As Nyatanga *et al* (1998) emphasise, change management should be at the forefront of this institutional support.

For instance, an institutional RPL facilitator could provide RPL training and development for academics and candidates alike, invariably preparing them for RPL assessment. An institutional RPL counsellor would provide support to candidates both through predetermined interactions but also in response to requests from the candidates. The counsellor would provide feedback to candidates on progress and results of RPL applications. The counsellor could also utilise such communication systems as the intranet to provide overall support to RPL candidates in the form of Frequently Asked Questions, references and so on.

5.3.3 RPL Assessment and Moderation

The roles of the assessor and moderator are vital in the RPL process. In both programmes that practised RPL, there was no consistency in the assessment report and moderators' report.

Guidelines should be developed for the role of the assessors and moderators, selecting assessors and moderators (the necessary skills, knowledge and background), fees paid for assessment and moderation services, and the requirements of assessment.

The assumption was made, particularly on the MPA programme, that academics selected from within the Faculty, are able to determine the competence of RPL candidates, even when knowledge is tacit and does not

resemble the traditional paradigm of university knowledge (Shalem and Steinberg, 2000). In fact the portfolio of evidence required by the candidates did not afford the opportunity for candidates to articulate what they know in ways that are most familiar and convenient to them (Michelson, 1997b). Therefore, academics involved in assessment or moderation of RPL should be provided with training and register as accredited providers with the ETDP SETA. Accreditation for assessment and moderation could be provided to academics through the RPL process!

5.3.4 RPL Quality Assurance

Though Senate endorsed RPL through the FHIG programme as a pilot study, and requested an evaluation of the programme, no formal evaluation has yet been undertaken[13].

The evaluation should have included both a review of the quality assurance arrangements of each stage of the RPL process, and feedback ascertained from both candidates and academics involved in the process. An evaluation model should be devised and embedded in all, or a sample of programmes, that practise RPL.

5.4 Successes and Challenges of RPL in the Faculty

The Faculty of M&C should celebrate the outcomes of its initial RPL practice, and acknowledge the contribution that individuals have made. The self-reported impact RPL has had on the lives of the candidates involved in this study has been a cause for celebration. However, without any mechanism for ascertaining feedback from both academics and RPL candidates, it is impossible to determine the challenges of RPL in the institution as a whole.

[13] As stated above, this Research Report was to form part of the evaluation report. However, a new draft institutional policy has already begun its journey to Senate, without inclusion of these or any other evaluation findings.

The process of RPL should be expanded to include feedback from RPL candidates and all institutional role players involved, as a means to continually evaluate and improve approaches to RPL.

5.4 Conclusion and Way Forward

The research context described in chapter one demonstrates that there is scope for RPL in the institution. As government funding dwindles, institutions need to consider alternative and flexible learning programmes that could attract new kinds of students and provide new sources of income.

The literature review in chapter two showed the socio-political and economical imperatives which led to the introduction for RPL in South Africa. Yet, few institutions in the country have strategically addressed the implementation of RPL. There continues to be a gap between policy and practice.

The report of the Study Team on the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (SAQA 2002b) surmises that RPL should be seen as a developmental strategy rather than a tool for transformation. I believe that we are a long way from even considering RPL as a development strategy, both in terms of institutional readiness and national government support.

This chapter has highlighted the need for a more comprehensive, structured and co-ordinated approach to RPL at the University of Fort Hare, in a bid to both institutionalise RPL policy and embed its processes and procedures in institutional practice.

The national government has communicated, in policy documents, the political and social value of developing and implementing RPL in higher education institutions, yet it has not proffered tangible support to institutions to embrace RPL.

This Research Report has identified some of the human and other resources that would be required to support faculties to implement RPL, and guide candidates through the RPL process. This in turn would require a budget. The institution needs to develop a strategy for sourcing this funding.

The principles of ‘equity’, ‘redress’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘commitment’ for the application of skills recognition, as identified in the draft institutional policy (see Appendix 3), are not presently reflected in the University of Fort Hare’s mission statement and goals. This suggests that RPL is not currently an expression of the university’s doctrine, and part and parcel if its academic discourse.

At the moment it would seem that RPL remains an elusive goal for the non-formal learner.

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University of Fort Hare
INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

FORT HARE INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) POLICY

2003

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Experiential Learning: Learning that has been acquired as a result of practical experience rather than through formal structured education.

Evidence: The proof that a candidate produces to authenticate previously acquired skills. This may include written documents, e.g., letters, testimonials, appraisals, work documents, syllabuses, schedules, job descriptions, etc., work samples, designs, letters, photos, videos, audiotapes, certificates.

Evidence Assessment Criteria: Assessment of evidence will be according to a set of assessment criteria that can be attached to direct and indirect evidence. These will include:

- *Authenticity*: can the candidate prove conclusive ownership of the submitted evidence?
- *Sufficiency*: is there enough evidence to prove conclusively that the skill or knowledge claimed can be transferred from one context to another?
- *Currency*: does the evidence represent current professional or vocational levels of competency?

Learning Outcomes: A learning outcome describes what a candidate knows and what he or she can do as a result of his or her learning experience. The candidate is required to describe his or her learning experience and match it with the learning outcomes for each course he or she is seeking credit for via the RPL process.

Portfolio: This is a file of assembled documented evidence that supports a candidate's claim for RPL credit or recognition. The term RPL Portfolio refers specifically to the RPL process and the product that need to be submitted for assessment for RPL credit.

Credit is recognition granted towards meeting the requirements of an award program, either on the basis of prior study, or of prior experience, assessed as equivalent in content and level to the course/s for which credit is sought.

Credit Transfer is the granting of advanced standing by the University to students on the basis of previous study undertaken in another institution and on the basis of recognition of prior learning.

Specified Credit is credit granted for a particular program component when the student has completed a part of a program in which the curriculum is substantially the same, which constitutes at least the same proportion of full-time study, and the standard attained is substantially the standard required for a pass in the specified program component offered at the University of Fort Hare.

Unspecified Credit is credit granted when the work completed elsewhere has been in a component of a program for which there is no equivalent component at the University's program. Usually granted as credit towards meeting the broadening general education or elective requirements of a program.

Assessment: The process of reviewing, measuring, and evaluating evidence of the candidate's learning to determine whether credit should be awarded.

Challenge Examination: Is an examination specifically drawn up to assess the generic knowledge a candidate has with regard to a specific module or course. This examination will not assess knowledge from a specific textbook or given by a specific lecturer. It will only assess knowledge according to the learning outcomes of the module or course. The challenge examination might include a case study, a demonstration or and oral.

SKILLS RECOGNITION POLICY DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

This recognition of prior learning policy which is also known as skills recognition policy is a recognition or an acknowledgment by the Fort Institute of Governance, University of Hare that there are a large number of prospective learners who have gained experience and appropriate learning outcomes that they would otherwise have been developed through the successful completion of an academic programme/course. This group of people have in the past been sidelined but the policy provides a guideline for the attainment of building blocks towards an academic programme which they may want to enrol. This outcome may have been gained through some form of or credentialed or non-credentialed study, through self-tuition, through work place exposure, or in some other way.

The implementation of skills recognition will be a major step in expanding formal education opportunities and services to people who have acquired knowledge and skills through experience and those who do not qualify for admission under regular admission policies. Fort Institute of Governance recognises that Skills Recognition is an important aspect of any training. It allows training to be effectively targeted by identifying an individual's current competencies and training requirements.

OBJECTIVES OF SKILLS RECOGNITION

1. Encourage a sense of lifelong and continuous learning, whereby a student should be able to transfer the knowledge and skills gained in one context or environment into others throughout his or her life.
2. Assess learning against set outcomes and Credit the candidate for the skills and competencies demonstrated thereby reducing duplications and wasteful expenditure on the part of the learner as well as the institute.
3. Increase the knowledge base and performance of the University through recognition of skills and competencies that have been acquire elsewhere by prospective students.
4. Enable the University to meet the needs of a wider range of 'non-traditional' students, and thereby maximise its mission towards the community it serves.

5. Promote progression and fast track learning programmes for those who demonstrate required competencies

DEFINING SKILLS RECOGNITION

Skills Recognition is the formal recognition of an individual's skills, knowledge and competencies acquired elsewhere that is relevant towards the attainment of a qualification by a candidate.

Skills recognition comprises two (2) components that are:

1. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

2. Credit Transfer

CRITICAL PRINCIPLES FOR THE APPLICATION OF SKILLS RECOGNITION

The following principles underpin the concept and the application of the skills recognition programme:

- Equity
- Redress
- Inclusion
- Commitment

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

According NSB of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, (Regulation 6140 of Government Gazette 18787 of 28 March 1998), RPL is defined as the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for specified qualification, and expectance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.

Recognition of Prior Learning is also known as: -

(a) Recognition of current competencies

(b) Accreditation of prior learning

(c) Credit for prior learning

(d) Assessment of prior learning

(e) Recognition of informal learning

(f) Assessment of experiential learning

Recognition of Prior Learning recognises that learning does not only take place in formal classroom situations but that people also learn and acquire knowledge and skills through one or some of the following: -

a) Informal training (e.g. in-service training, conferences, self-study, short courses)

b) Work experience

c) Life experience (e.g. community work and hobbies)

d) Formal study at non-accredited institutions

e) Informal study for recreational or personal interest

g) Company-based training

h) Industry-based training

i) Working with experts in the field

The RPL processes will measure the skills and knowledge a candidate has acquired against the learning outcomes in the module or course he or she intends to study. The purpose of the Recognition of Prior Learning process is to identify and assess previously acquired skills and knowledge pertinent to completing a course: -

1. Recognition of prior learning will be based on demonstrated learning.

2. Recognition of prior learning will be appropriate to the course or program in which it is accepted.

3. Recognition of prior learning will be for learning that has a balance, appropriate to the subject, between theory and practical application.

CANDIDATES REQUIRING RPL INCLUDES

Candidates requiring RPL may include but not limited to the following groups:

- Candidates who do not have the minimum requirement due to a range of scenarios such as early exit from formal academic programmes, war, displacements etc but who have built up substantial amounts of learning over a number of years attending learning programmes of various kinds.
- Candidates whose official capacity, professional qualifications, managerial and leadership potentials are convincing demonstrated through work profiles.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE RPL PROCESS

The aim of the RPL process is to provide an opportunity for learners to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that they acquired previously against the learning outcomes in a module that is intended for study. A range of outcomes may result from this process, these may include

- Advance placement for a particular degree
- Early completion
- Study only modules that are completely new
- Study at a higher level than would have been expected
- Non recognition due to unsatisfactory demonstration of previous learning
- Recommendation for placement at other levels
- Recommendation for specific bridging courses

SKILLS RECOGNITION PROCESS

1. It is the task of the applicant to document or otherwise demonstrate that he or she has achieved the performance criteria to the satisfaction of the University.

2. Each Skills Recognition application will be assessed on its merits.

3. Skills recognition must uphold standards. If there is any doubt on the evidence presented, the University will disapprove the application.

4. Skills recognition may only be given for whole units/modules/units of competencies. Accordingly, applicants are either exempted from a whole unit/module/unit of competency or none.

5. All staff involved with the skills recognition process will be trained in RPL assessing so that a common approach and standard can be maintained throughout the Institute.

6. The procedures to be adopted to assess a particular unit/module/unit of competency or range of experiences for skills recognition by the University's Fort Hare Institute of Governance will ensure that the evidence assessed is comparable in content and standard with the unit/module/unit of competency in which skills recognition is sought.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Assessment is central to quality assurance of the University of Fort's Fort Hare Institute of Government's educational programs. The assessment process to be adopted by Fort Hare Institute of Government will involve the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on whether candidates have acquired competencies towards the attainment of a desired qualification.

Learning will be assessed to establish whether candidates are competent in the following:

a) Foundational competence - that is, their understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it, in other words, what theoretical knowledge they have;

b) Practical competence - their ability to perform a set of tasks and making decisions;

c) Reflexive competence - their ability to integrate or connect their knowledge and skills so that they learn from their actions and are able to adapt to changes and unforeseen circumstances; and

d) Applied competence - how they put their knowledge into practice.

TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

The following assessment methods will be used: -

A wide range of assessments including (but not limited to the following) may be utilised. These include

1. PORTFOLIO OF EVIDENCE

   A portfolio compilation and assessment workshop is to be organised by the institute at a cost to the learners will provide guidance and direction for the learners seeking recognition of prior learning. This entails the documentation of verifiable evidence (may include simulations, performance assessments, work samples etc) that demonstrates the attainment of specific outcomes. These will be scrutinised by an internal body of assessors and eternally moderated before assessment results can be finalised.

2. FORMAL INTERVIEWS

   Candidates may be invited before a board of experts/ academic lecturers to ascertain the level of understanding of the RPL applicant to the subject matter of the course. Should a presentation be required, the candidate will be informed prior to the date of the interview.

3. FORMAL TESTS AND EXAMINATIONS (Challenge examinations)

   Learners may be invited to prepare and write tests to demonstrate their knowledge in a particular subject area. There will be no re-tests but tests will be externally moderated for quality assurance purposes.

4. ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments test a student's ability to apply concepts studied in a practical way. Assignments generally require students to undertake a considerable amount of research. The length and nature of each assignment varies according to each module or subject and guidance is provided

5. COURSE EQUIVQLENCIES

Course equivalencies involving evaluation of non-college and/or non-credit programs, courses and certificates.

The Director of the institute may recommend the appropriate evaluation method(s) for RPL purposes, acting on the advice of the subject lecturers for which the recognition is sought.

CREDIT TRANSFER

This is the process whereby a candidate is permitted to count relevant units/modules previously successfully completed, (through study at colleges, accredited private providers, professional bodies or enterprises and universities) towards his or her current course.

A candidate may receive “Exemptions with Credit” which means the course of study is reduced, or may receive “Exemptions without Credit”, meaning that a candidate does not need to study certain introductory units but will still be required to complete the total credit points for the course, by taking alternative units/modules).

GUIDELINES ON CREDIT TRANSFER

1. Decisions on the level of credit to be granted in a particular program shall be determined by Program Directors in accordance with the University policy and the procedures and frameworks established and maintained by Fort Hare Institute of Governance Board/University of Fort Hare.
2. If a student transfers from one program to another, credit approved for the original program will not automatically be transferred.

3. Credit will not normally be granted for courses completed more than ten years prior to application unless there is evidence of substantial relevant experience during the intervening period.
4. Unspecified credit appropriate to the award may be granted where no comparable University of Fort Hare course exists.
5. In special circumstances, for example where the applicant is unable to present sufficient documentary evidence to allow for the normal determination of credit and exemption, the applicant may be allowed to undertake a challenge examination.

APPEAL PROCESS

Candidates who want to appeal the outcome of the RPL process may do so in writing to the Director of the Institute and be required to pay an appeal fee. Attempt will be made to have the evidence of portfolio reviewed by another independent assessor (internal/external)

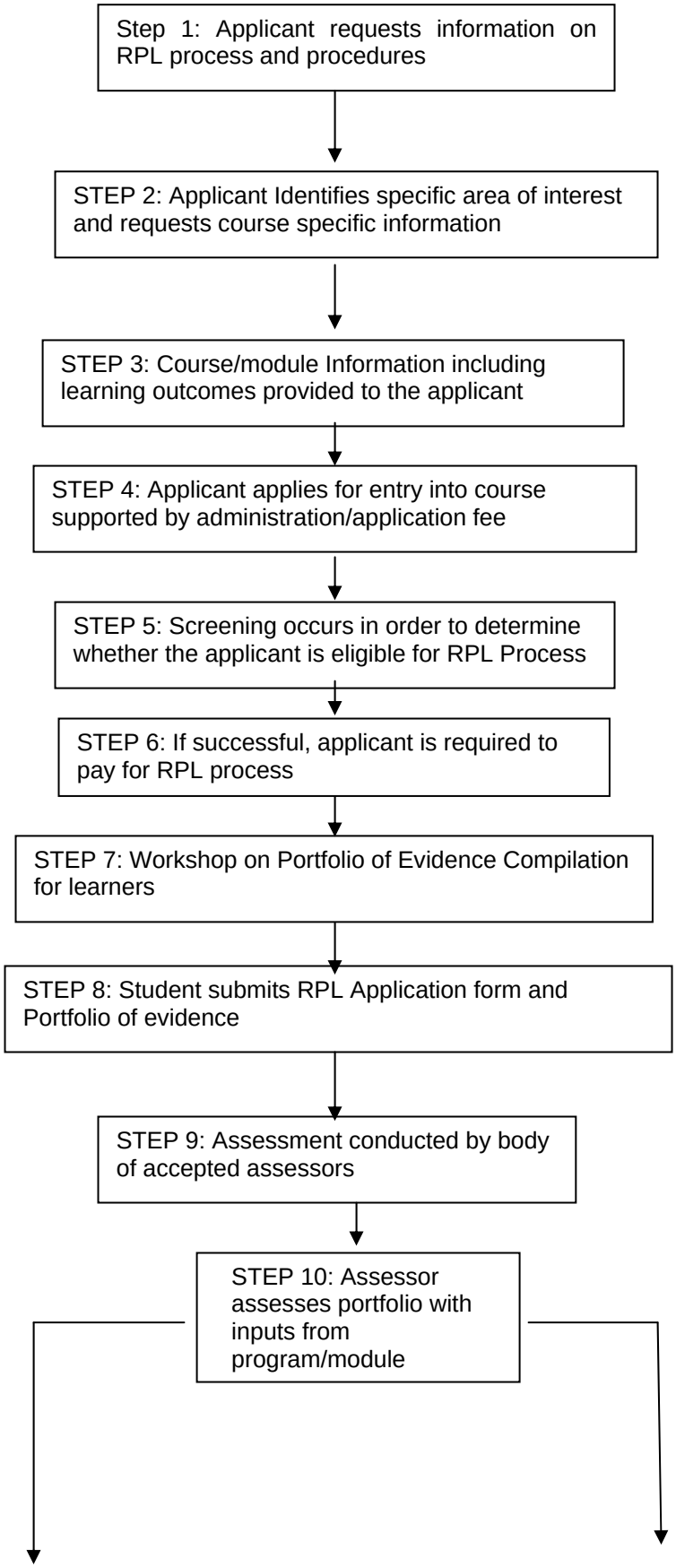
COSTS FOR RPL ADMINISTRATION

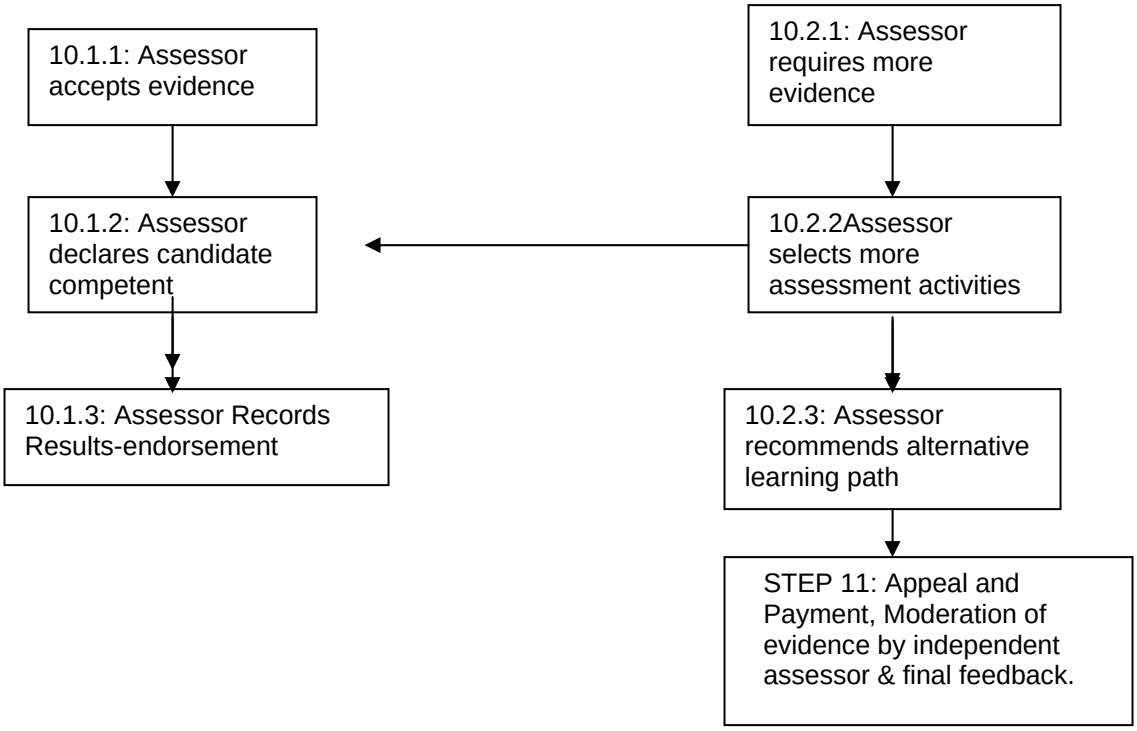
Learners will be expected to pay RPL administration fees for each module being applied for. The cost is paid in advance and pegged at a rate not exceeding the cost of the module tuition.

CONCLUSION

This policy has been developed by Staff at the Fort Hare Institute of Government in close consultation with the office of the Director of curriculum /RPL unit of the University of Fort Hare. This attempt at RPL will be monitored closely and the policy/procedure will be reviewed at the end of the first year and subsequently every three years. It should be noted that this opportunity serves as a pilot run for the broader University in the near future.

The Roll-Out Plan


Step 1: Applicant requests information on RPL process and procedures
STEP 2: Applicant Identifies specific area of interest and requests course specific information
STEP 3: Course/module Information including learning outcomes provided to the applicant
STEP 4: Applicant applies for entry into course supported by administration/application fee
STEP 5: Screening occurs in order to determine whether the applicant is eligible for RPL Process
STEP 6: If successful, applicant is required to pay for RPL process
STEP 7: Workshop on Portfolio of Evidence Compilation for learners
STEP 8: Student submits RPL Application form and Portfolio of evidence
STEP 9: Assessment conducted by body of accepted assessors
STEP 10: Assessor assesses portfolio with inputs from program/module


10.1.1: Assessor accepts evidence
10.1.2: Assessor declares candidate competent
10.1.3: Assessor Records Results-endorsement
10.2.1: Assessor requires more evidence
10.2.2Assessor selects more assessment activities
10.2.3: Assessor recommends alternative learning path
STEP 11: Appeal and Payment, Moderation of evidence by independent assessor & final feedback.

Appendix 2



University of Fort Hare

Faculty of Education
In-Service Programmes

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EASTERN CAPE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Private Bag X7488, King Williams Town, 5600 040 639 3081/3082 040 635 1883

PROPOSED POLICY FOR ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING OF TEACHERS WITH REQV13 SEEKING ADVANCED STANDING WITHIN THE B.ED.(FOUNDATION & INTERMEDIATE PHASE) PROGRAMME

1. Introduction and Background
2. Recognition of Prior Learning
3. Reference documents used for RPL policy
4. The purpose of offering Assessment of Prior Learning to teachers with REQV13
5. Exit Level Outcomes
6. Candidates requiring RPL
7. The Proposed RPL Process
8. Portfolio components, weighting and credit equivalence
9. Assessment
10. Costs for RPL Administration and Implementation
11. The RPL Process Plan

1. Introduction and Background

Background

The University of Fort Hare prospectus makes provision for teachers who have successfully completed the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) to be admitted to the second semester of Year 3 of the B.Ed. (F & I) degree. In other words, such teacher-learners are automatically awarded 60 credits (advanced standing) in the light of their NPDE qualification, which in fact covered the first 60 credits of the B.Ed.(F&I) programme. This means that such a teacher-learner needs only 180 credits to complete his or her degree studies.

A condition of this credit transfer rule is that such a teacher-learner forgoes his NPDE diploma and becomes a B.Ed. student. Such a teacher-learner exits the B.Ed. programme with REQV14.

Government Gazette 935 (22 Sept 2000, paragraph 3, page 14)[14] makes the following provision: "Learners entering a 480-credit B.Ed. from an 'old' 3-year (i.e. 360-credit) diploma[15] will be required to study an additional 240 credits to complete the 480-credit B.Ed. degree. The institution may credit the student through the RPL and/or school experience up to a maximum of 120 credits."

In the light of this provision, it is proposed that teacher-learners on REQV level 13 be offered the option of earning the first 60 credits of the B.Ed. (F & I) programme by

[14] Criteria for the Recognition and Evaluation of Qualifications for Employment in Education based on the Norms and Standards for Educators, 2000.
[15] Such as the Dip. Ed. or PTD.

assessment of prior learning, and of their ability to adopt the approach to learning embodied in the B.Ed. (F & I) programme. This would include teachers with 3-year (360-credit) teaching diplomas as well as teachers with an NPDE. A teacher who achieves the first 60 credits of the B.Ed. degree through RPL in this way will exit the programme with REQV 15.

2. Recognition of Prior Learning

According to NSB of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, (Regulation 6140 of Government Gazette 18787 of 28 March 1998) RPL is defined as the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for specified qualification, and expectance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.

Recognition of Prior Learning recognises that learning does not only take place in formal classroom situations but that people also learn and acquire knowledge and skills through one or some of the following:

a) Informal training (e.g. in-service training, conferences, self-study, short courses)
b) Work experience
c) Life experience (e.g. community work and hobbies)
d) Formal study at non-accredited institutions
e) Informal study for recreational or personal interest
g) Company-based training
i) Industry-based training
j) Working with experts in the field

The South African National Qualifications Framework policy document dated September 2002 states that the purpose of RPL is to:

- Identify what the RPL candidate knows and can do;
- Match the candidate's skills, knowledge and experience to the specific standards and the associated assessment criteria of the qualification;
- Assess the learner against those standards;

- Credit the candidate for skills, knowledge and experience built up through formal, informal and non-formal learning that occurred in the past.

3. Reference Documents used for RPL policy

The RPL policy expresses an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion. It takes into account relevant legislation and policy. It has been designed with reference to the relevant criteria that already exist in the Developmental Appraisal System (DAS), the Norms and Standards for Educators, and SAQA Policy document 0242/02 (The Recognition of Prior Learning in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework). Careful analysis of the knowledge, skills and values that prove competence in the education field has been done.

4. The Purpose of offering Assessment of Prior Learning to teachers with REQV13

The proposed RPL policy fulfils a number of purposes.

Firstly, it ensures that the UFH In-Service Programmes division complies with relevant and current national policies.

Secondly, (in line with SAQA Policy), this RPL policy promotes and fast-tracks progression through the learning programme.

Thirdly, it allows for the recognition of teacher-learners' prior learning, and their ability to adopt the approach to learning embodied in the B.Ed. (F & I) programme, by assessing their competence against the learning outcomes required for the first 60 credits of that programme.

5. Exit Level Outcomes

Exit level outcomes are grouped into four components which together reflect the work of a professional educator. The critical outcomes are integrated into the exit level outcomes.

Component 1: Competences relating to fundamental learning

Component 2: Competences relating to the subject and content of teaching

Component 3: Competences relating to teaching and learning processes.

Component 4: Competences relating to the school and profession

A descriptor of the RPL module will be taken through the relevant processes and structures and finally be given a course code.

6. Candidates requiring RPL

Practicing teachers on REQV level 13: teachers with an NPDE or a 3-year (360-credit) teaching diploma.

7. The proposed RPL process

1. Learners admitted to the B.Ed. (F & I) programme, and wishing to go through the RPL process, will have to register for the RPL module and pay a fee of R500.
2. They will receive six carefully-selected imithamo[16] from the first 60-credit year of the (part-time) programme, together with instructions as to how to proceed with their assignments and portfolio.
3. Three written assignments will be required: Assignment 1 will require short answers, covering the most important learning outcomes of the first 60 credits of the programme; Assignments 2 and 3 will be adapted from the imithamo Key Hand-in Activities, and will require implementation in classroom or school, plus a written report.
4. These assignments must be placed in a file, together with the evidence of classroom work required in the two workplace-based assignments and any other relevant evidence which the teacher-learner wishes to include. These will constitute the teacher-learner's RPL portfolio.
5. The portfolio must be presented to the Centre Leader at the closest learning centre, and defended in an interview. Centre Leaders will complete a report on each candidate. Academic Co-ordinators will monitor this process.
6. The results of the process will be presented at a meeting of the Faculty QA and Assessment Committee, and successful candidates recommended to the Faculty Board for admission to the second semester of Year 3 of the B.Ed.(F&I) – i.e. Year 2 of the part-time programme. Unsuccessful candidates will need to earn all 240 of the credits over 4 years.

[16] Imithamo: units of learning material used in the B.Ed. (F & I) programme, each unit accounting for 30 – 40 notional learning hours.

The portfolio provides the framework for undertaking the RPL process through which candidates can be assisted to articulate their learning against the Level 6 credit requirements as stipulated in the qualification.

8. Portfolio components, weighting and credit equivalence

Module	Weighting	Credit equivalence
Written assignment 1 Written assignment 2 Written assignment 3	1 1 1	15 15 15
One-on-one interview based on portfolio of evidence & outcomes	1	15
Total		60

9. Assessment

The effectively summative assessment strategies take into account the integration of RPL and new learning. This assessment is against the exit level outcomes for the first 60 credits of the B.Ed. (F & I) programme, and the assessment grids (rubrics) reflect the relevant assessment criteria for these outcomes. The broad criteria to be used in assessing much of this work are:

- evidence of professional growth
- evidence of actual reflective practice

If learners do not meet the exit level outcomes, they will enter the programme at semester 1 of Year 3 of the B.Ed.(F&I) – i.e. Year 1 of the part-time programme. In certain cases, however, a decision could be made to give them further work to complete, and to re-assess them.

A final assessment which takes into account the assessment of the three assignments, takes the form of a one-on-one interview with the assessor (the Centre Leader). A portfolio of evidence is presented by the candidates who are required to ‘defend’ their

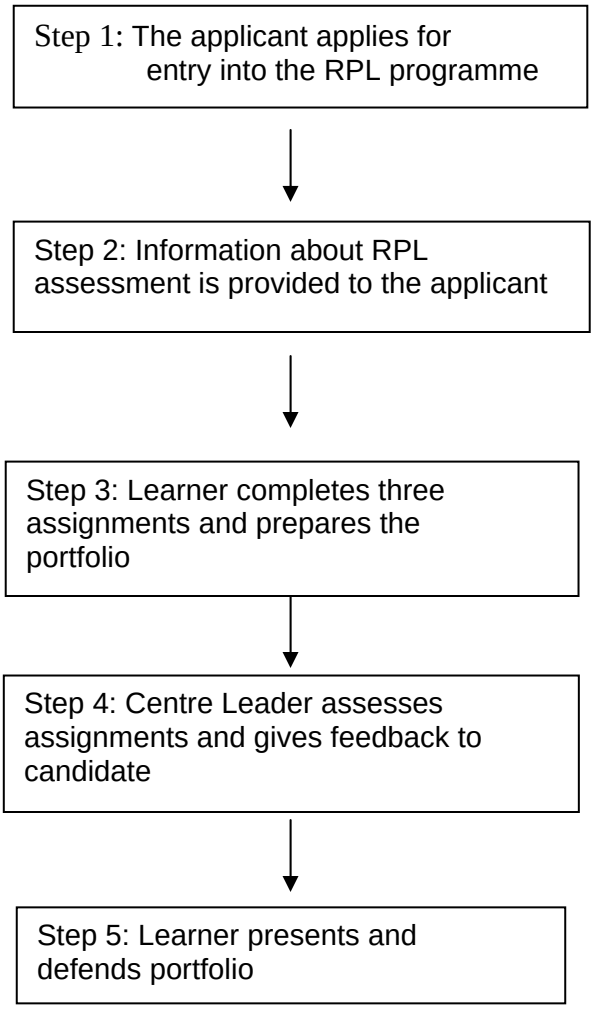
portfolios. Moderation of this assessment will be done by Academic Co-ordinators of the B.Ed.(F&I) programme.

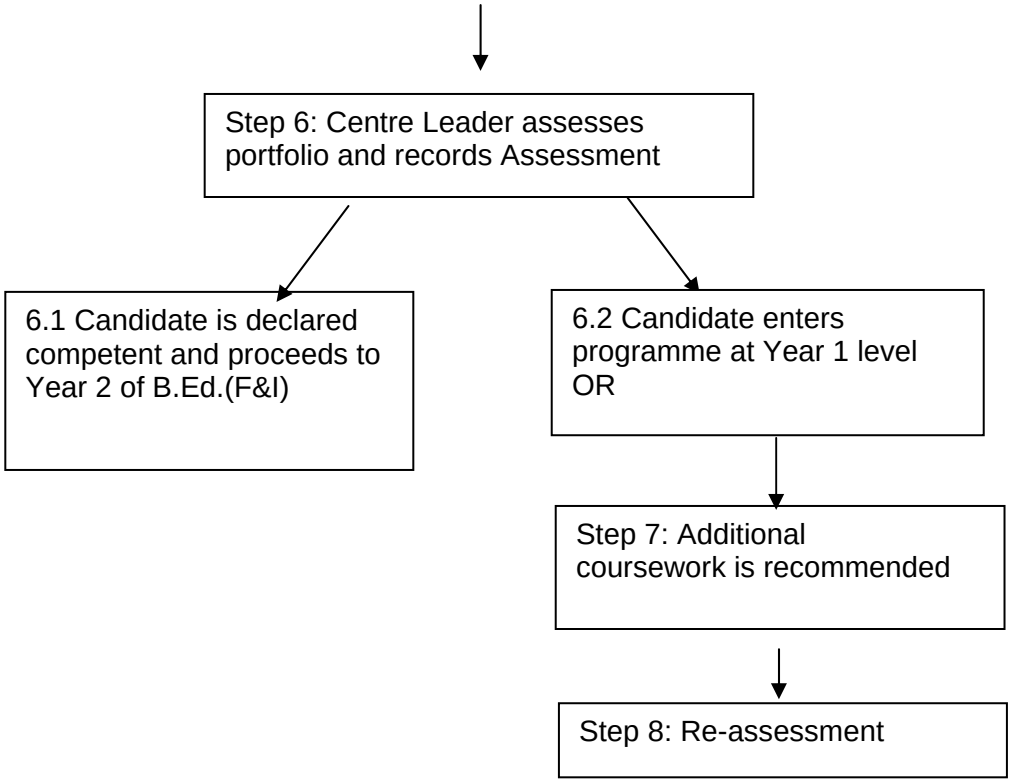
Credits achieved through recognition of prior learning will be recorded and reported in the same manner as conventional assessment and outcomes. Final academic transcripts need to show credits obtained through RPL.

10. Costs of RPL administration and implementation

The cost of RPL implementation (materials, payment of assessors and moderators, travel and accommodation costs) will be recovered by means of a fee charged to the teacher-learners (R500).

11. The RPL process plan




Step 6: Centre Leader assesses portfolio and records Assessment
6.1 Candidate is declared competent and proceeds to Year 2 of B.Ed.(F&I)
6.2 Candidate enters programme at Year 1 level OR
Step 7: Additional coursework is recommended
Step 8: Re-assessment

University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

Draft 4

University of Fort Hare Together in Excellence			
TITLE: Recognition of Prior Learning Policy			
Policy Number:	**TLC 005**	**Approved:**	
Date Approved:		**Minute:**	
Effective Date:		**No. of Pages:**	**Nineteen (19)**
Date Revised:		**Minute:**	
Refer Enquiries to: The Director – Teaching and Learning Centre			

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Appendix A: Acronyms and Abbreviations

References

1. Preamble

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa is critical to the development of an equitable education and training system. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) articulates some of the key objectives relevant to RPL as follows:

- Facilitate **access** to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; and
- Accelerate **redress** of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

The National Plan for Higher Education indicates that:

> An important avenue for increasing the potential pool of recruits to higher education is to recruit non-traditional students i.e. workers, mature learners, in particular women, and the disabled. The provision of higher education to workers, mature learners, and the disabled, aside from the equity and redress imperatives, would also play a significant role in addressing the shortage of high level skills in the short to medium term, especially as there is a large potential of recruits. Increasing the access of workers, mature learners and the disabled is an important policy goal in its own right and should be approached as such.
>
> (Ministry of Education, 2001:28)

Despite this recognition of the importance of increasing the diversity of learners in higher education, recent studies, Kraak (2003), Breier and Burness (2003), indicate that very little progress has been made in this regard.

The University of Fort Hare (UFH) is committed to the objectives as outlined by SAQA through its acknowledgement that that there are prospective students with valuable knowledge and skills gained through either formal, informal or non-formal means who could benefit from formal higher education.

RPL is defined in the National Standard Bodies Regulations (No 18787 of 28 March 1998 issued in terms of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995) as follows:

> 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.

To address the policy vacuum and to provide an enabling environment in which access to UFH can be expanded, UFH has developed a comprehensive policy on RPL. This RPL policy states the ideal and its implementation is subject to the availability of financial and other resources.

2. Policy Objective

This policy covers the process of gathering evidence and making judgments about a learner's performance in relation to standards and qualifications. It also aims to regulate the implementation of the RPL at the UFH and to ensure that consistent practices and standards are applied in the procedures that are followed.

3. Legislative Framework and Guiding Principles

3.1 RPL is statutory. It is promulgated in the SAQA Act (Act 58 of 1995) and the Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998), and governed by the following guidelines:

- National Standards Board No 18787 (28th March 1998);
- ETQA Bodies Regulations no 19231 (8th September 1998);
- Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards (SAQA, October 2001);
- The Recognition of Prior Learning in the Context of South African National Qualifications Framework (12 June 2002); and
- Criteria and Guidelines for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2004).

3.2 The University rationale for RPL is part of the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa, with specific reference to the emphasis on increased access to higher education, the broadening of the social base of higher education and on increasing the number of graduates.

3.3 The evaluation of prior learning is an academic task and, like other forms of assessment, is done by academic experts in a given field, drawing on other experts as needed.

3.4 RPL is based on a developmental model, not a deficit model of adult learning; it builds on knowledge and skills that adults have already acquired.

3.5 RPL practices for specific programmes must be context-specific and framed appropriately to those differing contexts.

3.6 RPL must be available to all staff and students currently at the institution and to those wishing to gain access to the institution for study purposes.

3.7 RPL must be used in ways that allow students a reasonable chance of succeeding in their studies. Provision of academic support must be an integral part of the RPL process.

3.8 Students will be expected to contribute towards RPL administration fees. The contribution will not exceed the cost of a full-time face-to-face module/course or learning programme. The administration fees should not create barriers for potential students.

3.9 When establishing assessment mechanisms and assessing learning from work or life experience, the following will be taken into account:

3.9.1 **Authenticity** – the applicant has actually demonstrated the learning outcome that is being claimed;

3.9.2 **Currency** – the learning outcome is still valid and demonstrable;

3.9.3 **Quality** – the learning has reached the acceptable level;

3.9.4 **Relevance** – the learning is applicable to the area claimed;

3.9.5 **Transferability** – the learning outcome can be applied outside the specific context in which it was learned; and

3.9.6 **Comparability** – the assessment mechanisms adopted should ensure that the prior learning is comparable in content and standard with the course(s) in which credit is sought. The standards applied in assessing prior learning should not be greater than those required to pass the course(s).

4. Purpose of RPL

The purpose of RPL is to:

4.1 identify, assess and recognise the skills and knowledge gained by individuals in either formal, informal or non-formal contexts.
4.2 enrich the academy, and the curriculum, by facilitating dialogue across sites of knowledge and practice.
4.3 encourage a sense of lifelong and continuous learning, whereby a student should be able to transfer the knowledge and skills gained in one context or environment into others throughout his or her life.
4.4 increase the knowledge base and performance of the University through recognition of skills and competencies that have been acquired elsewhere by prospective students.
4.5 contribute to the holistic assessment and self-assessment of people entering onto a learning path.

5. Forms of RPL

RPL may be used for:

5.1 **access** into a particular module/course or programme when a candidate is able to demonstrate through appropriate assessment(s) the exit outcomes of the module, course or programme preceding that particular module/course or programme;
5.2 **specified credit** for designated subjects, modules, units or competencies;
5.3 **unspecified credit** resulting in the student being required to complete fewer subjects, modules or competencies, for example, by exempting a student from undertaking elective modules;
5.4 **block credit** resulting in exemption from the requirements to undertake a block component of a course/programme, for example, first semester or first year;
5.5 **exemption standing** which involves exempting a student from undertaking preparatory subjects, units modules or competencies in the early stages of the course or programme, while still requiring the student to undertake the same number of subjects, units, modules or competencies as they would be required to complete if they had not been granted exemption. This usually involves substituting the exempted subjects, units, modules or competencies with others;
5.6 **advanced standing** resulting in the award of credits towards a qualification for which a candidate has registered; and
5.7 **advanced status** which provides access to a level of a qualification higher than the logical next level following on the preceding qualification.

Once a student has been awarded credit on the basis of RPL, subsequent credit transfer based on these learning outcomes should not include revisiting the RPL assessment,

but should be based on credit transfer agreements, articulation arrangements or other agreements between institutions.

6. Related Policies

This RPL Policy should be read in conjunction with the under-mentioned institutional policies, some of which still need to be formulated.

- Assessment and Moderation of Student Learning Policy
- Co-operative Education Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Short Course Policy
- y
- Plagiarism Policy

7. Human Resource Development for RPL

The following categories of human resource development are essential for successful implementation of RPL:

7.1 Academics:

Planning for:

7.1.1 articulation and learning pathways and administrative processes capable of dealing with credit transfers and transcriptions;
7.1.2 the review and moderation of assessment processes and tools, that is, the nature and extent of quality assurance, the frequency of moderation and methodologies; and
7.1.3 the principles of assessment, weighting of evidence in relation to the qualification and level and the flexibility of entry and exit points.

7.2 RPL Advisors

7.2.1 Portfolio development and related workshops;
7.2.2 One-on-one advising;
7.2.3 Training on the development of self-awareness, sensitivity and the ability to know and manage one's own biases, including bias against experiential and non-formal forms of learning and language bias;
7.2.4 Assessment approaches, tools, mechanisms; and
7.2.5 Guidance on collecting evidence.

7.3 RPL Assessors

7.3.1 Training of assessors to qualify to assess RPL and give feedback in that discipline;
7.3.2 Training on the development of self-awareness, sensitivity and the ability to know and manage one's own biases including bias against experiential and non-formal forms of learning and language bias; and
7.3.3 Communication strategy.

7.4 RPL Moderators

7.4.1 Training to qualify to moderate assessments; and
7.4.2 Communication strategy.

7.5 Academic Administrative Staff (Admissions and Faculty Managers)

Develop an understanding of:
7.5.1 RPL candidates' needs; and
7.5.2 Policies and procedures relating to RPL.

8. Quality Assurance and RPL

Quality management of RPL entails a number of elements of institutional planning and actions to address quality. These include:

8.1 A review of the quality management systems related to RPL need to be incorporated into the scope of the Academic reviews where appropriate. This should include a focus on assessment methods; moderation; support for students; curriculum review; and staff development.
8.2 Academics who assess potential learners for RPL should design appropriate assessment methods that will allow judgements of past learning in relation to the outcomes of the particular courses or programmes
8.3 RPL should be an integrated feature of assessment policies, including moderation, management and reporting procedures that constitute the agreed upon University assessment of student learning as well as rules and regulations
8.4 Sufficient evidence should be collected to enable judgements of different kinds of skills and knowledge of the applicant in relation to the outcomes of the particular courses or programmes in which the candidate is interested
8.5 The Head of Department should evaluate the recommendation of the RPL Assessor/RPL Moderator by examining whether the evidence provided justifies the evaluative judgement made by the lecturer
8.6 The Head of Department should also ensure that assessment methods used to arrive at any evaluative judgements were valid and fair
8.7 Faculties should maintain information on RPL assessments, including unsuccessful and successful applications
8.8 The Faculty needs to make sure that there are mechanisms in place to provide educational counselling and advice for adult learners
8.9 An open and transparent appeals process, as outlined in the University rules and regulations will be followed. This will include the explicit detailing, when requested, of the reasons for an unsuccessful RPL application
8.10 Continuous review of procedures for RPL and success rates of students admitted via RPL should be conducted by faculties and annual reports submitted to the institutional Academic Planning Committee and the Institutional Quality Assurance Committee (Cross reference with the Assessment of Student Learning Policy)
8.11 Systems should be in place to monitor progress of candidates who enter learning programmes post RPL
8.12 Faculties should keep a system that stores and update relevant student information in order to inform policy, planning, implementation and review of RPL

9. RPL and Student Support

RPL mechanisms across the University must be embedded in broader structures of student support. These include:

9.1 Support during the initial enquiry / orientation.
9.2 A holistic assessment of learners' current levels of academic readiness and a plan for the academic development of RPL candidates to develop viable learning pathways.
9.3 Provision of appropriate opportunities for academic development, including language development, academic writing, research skills, where needed.
9.4 Support for portfolio-development, with the candidates being assisted in preparing and presenting evidence in a coherent and systematic fashion and educational planning or advising post assessment.
9.5 Support services that consciously address invisible barriers like re-aligning existing academic development programmes to suit the needs of adult learners, advising programmes, assistance with identifying equivalencies and preparation for assessment.

10. RPL and the Curriculum

Curricula will increasingly be informed by the additional knowledge of candidates acquired outside the formal education setting as the outcomes-based education and training system matures and the debate on RPL and assessment practices, in terms of what knowledge is valuable and worth considering, is recognised.

10.1 Epistemological challenges:

The University recognises that one of the challenges of RPL is to negotiate the relationship between knowledge that is created, organized and utilized differently across different sites of practice. The relationship between academic curricula and professional practice differs across programmes and disciplines as does the mix of theoretical study, application, and interface with the broader society. RPL provides the opportunity to interrogate the curriculum, test epistemological and pedagogical assumptions, and recognises both the foundational principles and changing face of academic enquiry.

In the University context, RPL is premised on the expectation that adults acquire and create knowledge through a variety of formal, informal and non-formal learning experiences. Adult learners especially need an environment in which their prior learning can be respected, a space to explore and articulate learning and academic ways of knowing and guidance in developing an appropriate plan for future learning.

In RPL procedures within the University context, the assessment of knowledge, including prior learning, remains the domain of academics with expertise in a given field. Admissions decisions are made by Faculty managers in consultation with appropriate academic staff, but guiding learners through the exploration of their own learning and the relationship of that learning to academic knowledge and discourse is an academic function. Academics will also take the lead in

exploring the pedagogical and curricular possibilities opened by and through RPL.

10.2 Curriculum Responsiveness:

RPL is an aspect of the UFH commitment to equity and redress and reflects its openness to alternative forms of pedagogy and assessment. At the same time, the relationship between academic knowledge and the knowledge created in other sites of practice can be subject to healthy contestation, depending on the context.

10.3 Curriculum Change:

RPL processes that bring experienced adults into the academy provide the opportunity for mutual exchange across forms of expertise. Where appropriate, and depending on the disciplinary context or field of study, Faculties and programmes may choose to create curricula tailored to accommodate and empower RPL learners whose self-worth may have been undermined in the past. Such curriculum-development provides the opportunity to revisit the curricula structures and pedagogical practices created with school-leavers in mind and takes account of learning that has occurred in a variety of contexts. RPL also invites contributions to explore current academic knowledge in order to develop interdisciplinary and innovative programmes and research.

10.4 RPL as a Learning Process:

RPL, like other forms of assessment, has a diagnostic and evaluative function. The University, however, recognises that self-assessment and articulation of one's prior learning, the creation of a learning pathway, and the exploration of the relationship between experiential and academic learning is itself a learning experience. Where appropriate, faculties should develop credit- and non-credit-bearing modules in which such assessment, self-assessment and educational planning can take place. Even when not credit-bearing, such modules are more than assessment exercises which provide the opportunity to interrogate past learning experiences and explore the meanings of and possibilities for new learning.

11. RPL Assessment

Assessment is central to quality assurance of educational programmes at the University and the training and orientation of assessors and other staff members involved in assessment is a critical component for the success of implementing the principles and objectives of this RPL policy. The role of the assessors is to:

- Inform the candidate about the requirements of the modules/qualification/unit standard;
- Support and guide the candidate in the collection of evidence;
- Assist the candidate plan for the assessment;
- Inform the candidate about the timing of the assessment; and
- Conduct the assessment and provide feedback.

For the purposes of RPL, this role should ideally be performed by different people to avoid potential conflict of interest and bias, but could be performed by the same person, preferably a trained practitioner.

The assessment process will involve the process of collecting evidence and making judgements about the knowledge, skills and values that will prove competence and articulate with the outcomes of a desired qualification. Learning will be assessed to establish whether candidates demonstrate appropriate competence in the following:

a) Foundational competence - their understanding of what they are doing and why they are doing it, in other words, what theoretical knowledge they have;

b) Practical competence - their ability to perform a set of tasks and make decisions;

c) Reflexive competence - their ability to integrate or connect their knowledge and skills so that they learn from their actions and are able to adapt to changes and unforeseen circumstances.

11.1 RPL Assessment Methodologies

RPL assessment methodologies should be chosen based on their appropriateness to a particular context, learner, discipline and programme. They may be chosen by an individual assessor, a team of assessors or by those in the leadership of the programme in question. Whilst the choice of methodologies is ultimately an academic function, the University recognises the importance of learners' input into the decision-making process. The choice and use of a given set of RPL methodologies must be consistent with the UFH Assessment Policy and meet key criteria for validating assessment practices, in particular, validity, reliability, fairness, legitimacy, appropriateness, manageability, feasibility and attention to unintended negative consequences.

Faculties need to ensure that mature learners admitted through RPL are provided with the necessary support to acquire effective academic literacy in English, and to provide students with opportunities to use their home languages as a tool for learning, and to scaffold access to disciplinary discourse. In some cases, it may be possible and appropriate for RPL candidates to demonstrate their learning in the principle language of their professional practice.

11.2 Methods of Assessment

A wide range of assessments methods, including, but not limited to the following, may be utilised. The assessment methods include:

11.2.1 **Portfolio** – to validate a candidate's learning by providing a collection of evidence that reflect prior learning and achievement. It will include own work, reflections on own practice and indirect evidence from others that are qualified to comment. The portfolio will identify relevant connections between learning and the specified or unspecified credits sought.

11.2.2 **Interviews** (structured or unstructured) – to clarify issues raised in documentary evidence presented and/or to review scope and depth of learning. Interviews may be particularly useful in areas where judgement and values are important.

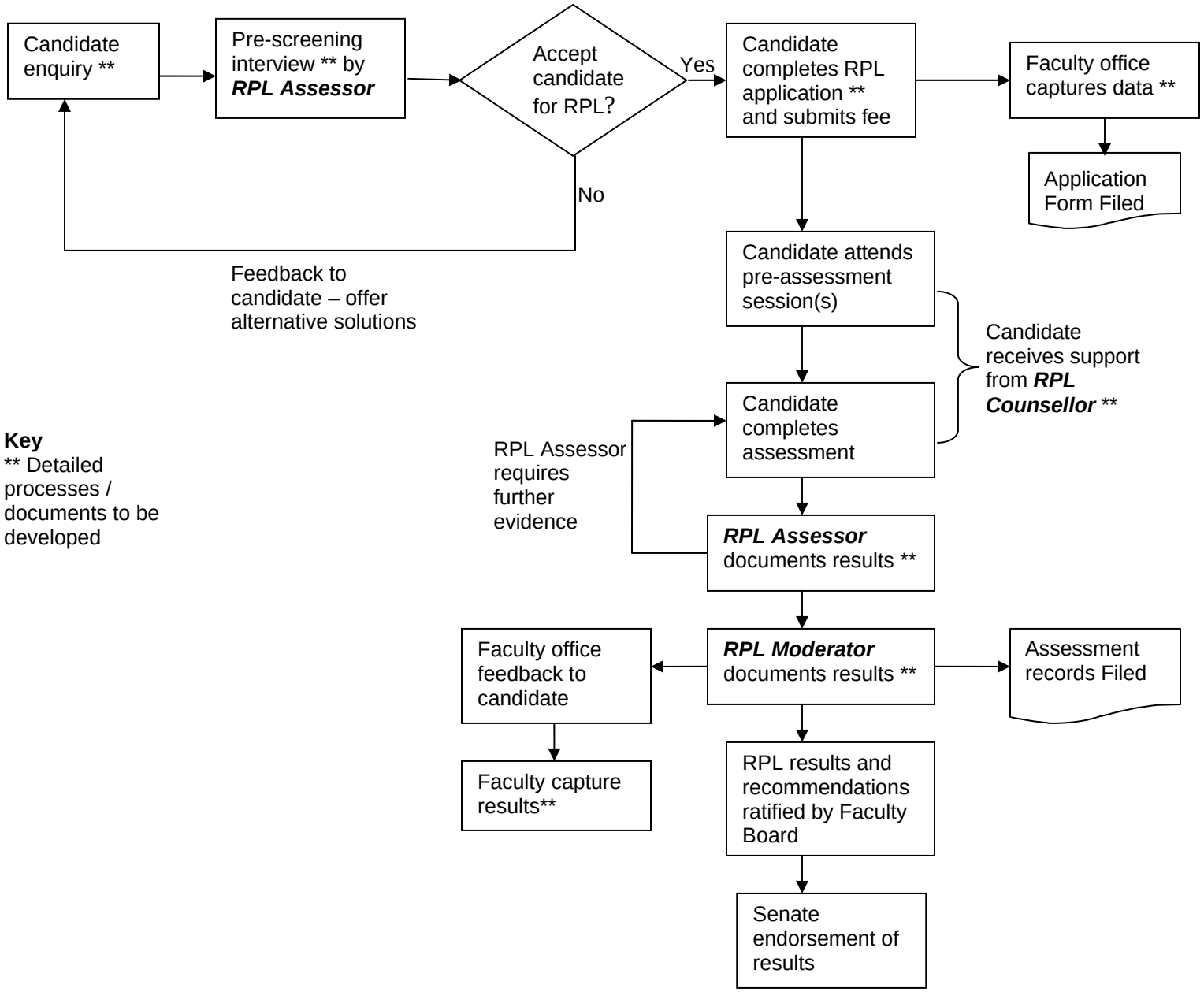
11.2.3 **Written Tests and Examinations** – to test concepts and basis skills and applications using practical examples.
11.2.4 **Assignments and Essays** – to check the quality and standard of academic writing and use of references, ability to develop a coherent argument, and to confirm extent, understanding and transferability of knowledge and critical evaluation of ideas.
11.2.5 **Debates** – to confirm capacity to sustain a considered argument demonstrating adequate knowledge of the subject.
11.2.6 **Presentations** – to check ability to present information in a way appropriate to subject and audience.
11.2.7 **Performance Testing** – to test applications of theory in a structured context in correct/safe manner.
11.2.8 **Oral Examinations** – to check deep understanding of complex issues and ability to explain in simple terms.
11.2.9 **Examples of work done/performed/designed** – to check quality of work, relevance to credit sought and authenticity of production.
11.2.10 **Book Review** – to ensure currency and that the analysis of appropriate literature is at a satisfactory level.
11.2.11 **Annotated Literature Review** – to illustrate a range of reading done by the candidate and ensure appropriate coverage to fulfil subject requirements.
11.2.12 **Special Projects** – may be used to meet a variety of purposes – to add greater currency to knowledge and skills and to extend the scope of prior learning.
11.2.13 **Reports/Critiques/Articles** – to indicate level of knowledge and assess analytical and writing skills and issues involved in the current debate on the subject [In SAQA from Cohen, R. in Harris, J., 2000: 148,149]
11.2.14 **Letters of Recommendation/Expert Testimony**
11.2.15 **Case Studies**
11.2.16 **Documentation of successful past learning experiences**
11.2.17 **Simulations**
11.2.18 **Demonstrations**
11.2.19 **Observations**

12. Offices Accountable for Implementation

Senate is responsible for the implementation of this policy within the University. Senate delegates this responsibility to the Executive Deans who are responsible for overseeing the implementation of this policy in every case in which a student in his/her Faculty is affected. Support for the implementation of this policy will be provided by the Teaching and Learning Centre and the Quality Management and Assurance Unit.

13. Implementation Strategy

Faculties should identify possible sites of RPL and then propose an implementation strategy which details resource requirements and timelines using the RPL Process Map on the following page as a guide.


Candidate enquiry **
Pre-screening interview ** by ***RPL Assessor***
Accept candidate for RPL?
Yes
No
Feedback to candidate – offer alternative solutions
Candidate completes RPL application ** and submits fee
Faculty office captures data **
Application Form Filed
Candidate attends pre-assessment session(s)
Candidate receives support from ***RPL Counsellor*** **
Candidate completes assessment
RPL Assessor requires further evidence
RPL Assessor documents results **
RPL Moderator documents results **
Faculty office feedback to candidate
Faculty capture results**
Assessment records Filed
RPL results and recommendations ratified by Faculty Board
Senate endorsement of results
Key
** Detailed processes / documents to be developed

Appendix A:

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance (bodies)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QMS	Quality Management System
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UFH	University of Fort Hare

Definitions

Accreditation means the indication that official approval or recognition has been given to a course, a programme of training or a provider of training.

Access means to provide ease to entry to appropriate level of education and training for all prospective learners in a manner which facilitates progression.

Advanced standing means to award credits towards a qualification for which a candidate has registered.

Advanced status means to provide access to a level of a qualification higher than the logical next level following on the preceding qualification.

Assessment means the process of gathering evidence and making judgments about students' achievements in relation to stated learning outcomes, and recording and reporting of these judgments.

Assessment criteria means articulations of the competences required to determine whether or not an outcome has been achieved.

Assessment tasks means learning activities designed to obtain evidence about a student's level of competence against stated learning outcomes.

Challenge Examination means an examination specifically drawn up to assess the generic knowledge of a prospective candidate has with regard to a specific module or course. This examination will not assess knowledge fro a specific textbook or given by a specific lecturer. It will only assess knowledge according to the learning outcomes of the module or course. The challenge examination might include a case study, a demonstration and or an oral presentation.

Certification means to certify credits attained for the purposes of a qualification.

Continuous assessment means a system of assessment by which all aspects of a student's performance during a module/course/programme are taken into account when making a judgment about the student's level of competence.

Credits means the value assigned to a given number of notional hours of learning which may be accumulated until conditions have been met for the award of a module/course/programme/qualification.

Criterion-referenced assessment means the process of using pre-specified criteria or standards against which to make judgments about a student's performance.

Critical Outcomes means broad, generic cross-curricula outcomes that underpin all learning recognised by SAQA.

Diagnostic assessment means a specialised procedure which is concerned with determining the cause(s) of persistent or recurring learning difficulties that are left unresolved by formative assessment.

Evaluation means the process of gathering information from students, peers and literature in order to reflect on the quality of teaching and courses.

Expected Levels of Performance means standards that students are expected to achieve during a module/course/programme.

Final mark means the mark obtained at the end of a completed module/course/programme, the composition of which is determined by the rules for that particular module/course/programme. The general rule of the University being that the final mark is the average of the semester/year mark and the examination mark.

Formal education means formal education as used here is the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured 'education system', spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university

Formative Assessment means assessment whish is conducted during instruction to provide prospective candidate with feedback about what learning they have achieved in order to improve their competence as well as to develop the curriculum.

Informal education means informal education as used here is the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment – at home, at work, at play etc.

Integration means the grouping of specific learning outcomes from different modules/courses/programmes in terms of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values.

Internal Moderation means a process designed to ensure that assessment methods are appropriate for the standards being measured, the judgments about students' performance against stated learning outcomes are carried out in a consistent and trustworthy manner, and to provide assessors with feedback to improve their assessment practices.

Learning outcomes means high quality, culminating demonstrations of significant learning in context.

Learning Outcomes means a learning outcome describes what a candidate knows and what he/she can do as a result of his/her learning experience**.** The candidate is required

to describe his or her learning experience and match it with the learning outcomes for each course he or she is seeking credit for via the RPL process**.**

Moderation means the process of ensuring that all assessors who assess a particular qualification are using equivalent assessment methods, and making similar, and consistent judgments about students' performance against stated learning outcomes

Non-formal education means non-formal education is any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children

Norm-referenced assessment means the process of comparing a student's performance with that of peers in the same class or cohort

Outcomes-based education means a learner-centred, results oriented approach to education that requires students to demonstrate evidence that they are able to achieve stated learning outcomes.

Peer assessment means the assessment of students' learning/performance by other students in the same class or cohort in order to help each other improve their learning/performance.

Portfolio means a portfolio is a deliberate, strategic and specific collection of a student's work or evidence of a student's work over time that demonstrates the learning that has occurred in order to meet stated learning outcomes.

Placement means to determine the appropriate level for learners wanting to enter education and training through a diagnostic assessment.

Rubric means an assessment tool to record a student's level of performance against stated outcomes and assessment criteria.

Self-assessment means the process whereby students make judgments about their own performance against stated outcomes and assessment criteria.

Standards means are a specification of performance across defined domain of activity. The basis for a specification is the separation of an activity into functions. Each function is attached a set of criteria which define the limits of acceptable performance.

Summative Assessment means assessment conducted at the end of a module/course/programme to determine a candidate's level of performance i.e. what the candidate knows and can do, in relation to stated outcomes and assessment criteria.

Verification means the process by which the recommendations from the provider about the award of credits or qualifications of learners are checked.

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REPORT ON PORTFOLIOS

[redacted]

The portfolios of the two learners show that the knowledge and experience acquired will ~~provide the~~ contribute to the RPL that will ~~enable them~~ allow vertical articulation. This is true of the following modules:

- Communication in modern government
- Public Sector Finance
- Human Resource Management
- Introduction to Information Technology
- Project management
- Financial management and Accounting for ~~Non~~-financial managers.

However with regard to Public Administration, only the introduction has been done.

My recommendations are as follows:

- the learners should take modules on Public Policy and Public ~~Sector~~ management. This should take ~~four~~ a semester.
- the total number of credits should be checked to determine at which level they could ~~not~~ start seeing that they only have a certificate course. It is important that the total number of credits required by SAQA

and CHE ~~are~~ ~~obtained~~ at a specific level are obtained.

It is my considered view that the modules on Public Policy and Public Sector Management should be included in the Certificate Course as was the case before.

[redacted]