



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG

## **Policy: Recognition of Prior Learning**

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### **Related documents**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UJ documents</b></p> <p>(e.g. Policies, Regulations, Guidelines, Contracts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Academic Regulations</b></li> <li>• <b>Admission Policy;</b></li> <li>• <b>Assessment Policy;</b></li> <li>• <b>Development and Evaluation of learning materials Policy</b></li> <li>• <b>Policy on People with Disabilities;</b></li> <li>• <b>Teaching and Learning Policy;</b></li> <li>• <b>Work Integrated and Service Learning Policy.</b></li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Other</b></p> <p>(e.g. Legislation, DoE and HEQC directives and guidelines)</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>CAEL: 1995. Criteria for quality assurance; Government Gazette No 20844, February 2000; Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997); SAQA Regulation 452, No. 18787: March 1998; Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998); South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (Act 58 of 1995); White Paper on Higher Education (White Paper 3 of 1997)</b></p> </div>
<p><b>Stakeholders affected by this document (units and divisions that should be familiar with it).</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Executive Deans;</b></li> <li>• <b>Heads: Academic Departments;</b></li> <li>• <b>Heads: Faculty Administration</b></li> <li>• <b>Lecturers (Part-time and Full-time);</b></li> <li>• <b>Directors: Central Administration</b></li> <li>• <b>Heads: Central Administration</b></li> <li>• <b>Heads: Academic Support Units.</b></li> <li>• <b>Departments</b></li> <li>• <b>Heads: Client Services</b></li> <li>• <b>Director: Corporate Communication</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Website address of this document:</b></p>	

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Johannesburg accepts Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an integral part of the academic programme and as an initiative to support transformation of the education and training system in South Africa. It is acknowledged that all learning has value and the University accepts the challenge to assess prior learning and to award recognition and, where appropriate, credit that is aligned to University programmes, in order to promote lifelong learning. This is reflected in the vision and mission of the University.

## 2. PREAMBLE

The introduction of RPL was legislated in the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) and was clearly promoted in the White Paper on Higher Education (White Paper 3 of 1997). RPL is regarded in South Africa as one of the means whereby equity and redress for past inequalities can be promoted. It is therefore crucial for all higher-education institutions to introduce and maintain the practice of RPL that supports the notion of lifelong learning and outcomes-based education.

The University's Admissions Policy makes provision for RPL as an alternative access route for candidates who do not meet the general minimum admission requirements for admission to the University.

This Policy for the Recognition of Prior learning is read in conjunction with other relevant UJ Policies.

## 3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

The RPL policy of the University operates in accordance with the University's Academic Rules and Regulations as well as within the following legislative framework:

### **3.1 South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act (Act 58 of 1995) and the aims of the National Qualifications Framework**

The aims of the National Qualifications Framework are:

- (a) facilitating access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- (b) accelerating the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities;
- (c) contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large (2 {b}, {d} and {e}).

### **3.2 Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998)**

This Act has the aim of improving vocational skills of employees through the establishment of Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). The providers of education, such as the University, together with the Higher Education Quality Assurance (HEQA),

are required by SAQA to implement RPL so as to ensure that the goal of education for social development is achieved.

### **3.3 Professional Boards**

The requirements of Professional Boards are applicable to relevant individual programmes and will be stipulated in Faculty Rules.

## **4. OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the policy is to provide institutional guidelines on the principles and processes that serve as basis for faculty-specific RPL practices. Detailed processes will be found in the Appendix to the Policy.

## **5. DEFINITIONS**

### ***Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)***

RPL has reference to the 'comparison of previous learning and experience' of a prospective student, 'howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance of such learning for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements' (SAQA Regulation 452, No. 18787, March 1998:5).

RPL defined in the context of the University refers to:

### **Learning from experience**

RPL for learning acquired through work experience, in-service training, self-study or life experience such as voluntary or community work.

## **6. PURPOSE**

The purpose of RPL at the University is to recognise all forms of prior experiential learning in order to:

- (a) widen access to Higher Education;
- (b) facilitate mobility and progression within the career paths and programmes at the University;
- (c) grant advanced placement and/or status.

## **7. SCOPE**

The RPL policy of the University covers all cases of previous learning and experience, howsoever obtained. Although emphasis in RPL is placed on experiential learning through non-formal processes, all relevant learning, also by means of formal programmes, should be included in the evaluation.<sup>1</sup> The RPL policy is supported by a separate Appendix with processes and procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> Normal credit exemptions and status recognition will be dealt with by already existing processes.

## 8. PRINCIPLES

The following principles are applicable to RPL practice at the University:

1. Recognition of prior learning allows access to further study by granting the status, but not the award, of the prerequisite qualification.
2. The UJ does not accept any form of RPL evaluation undertaken by any other institution.
3. Any recognition of prior learning granted is valid only for the period specified by the Faculty.
4. Admission to the university, based on RPL, is subject to the rules and regulations of the university.
5. Recognition is given only for current competence, as determined by the Faculty.
6. Recognition of prior learning is programme-specific; recognition is given only for learning that is aligned to the learning outcomes of the specific programme or module.
7. Applicants are exposed to a formal RPL process.
8. Evidence (portfolios, challenge examinations etc) must be assessed as relevant, sufficient and current.
9. Learning must be assessed against the learning outcomes (and not primarily the content) of specific qualifications and / or modules.
10. Quality assurance processes guarantee the integrity and credibility of all aspects of the RPL process.
11. Non-refundable application and assessment fees are payable for RPL. Fees may not exceed the cost of any credits being applied for.
12. If the applicant is not satisfied with the outcome of any stage of the RPL process, s/he can appeal the process.
13. Once registered, the student becomes a member of the student body and all academic rules and regulations apply.

## **9. RPL PROCESS**

The accreditation of learning obtained through experience (whether for access or for credit) must comply with the detailed Procedures, as found in the Appendix to the Policy.

## **10. RPL Structures**

- 10.1 An institutional RPL Working Group with representation from each faculty, reporting to the STLC
- 10.2 (as a minimum) an Institutional Officer, located in the Student Enrolment Centre, whose job description includes administrative responses to initial RPL queries and who is trained in RPL.
- 10.3 Faculty structures : A faculty governance structure, as determined by the Faculty Board and approved by Senate, to accommodate the implementation of RPL according to the above principles. This structure should include a Faculty Committee with a clear responsibility to also address RPL matters when required, a Faculty RPL Officer, and reporting lines through to the Faculty Board and to Senate.

## **11. QUALITY MANAGEMENT**

Quality management is in accordance with relevant University policies. The following structures and processes serve different purposes in the quality management of the RPL process:

- 11.1 Senate;
- 11.2 Faculty Boards;
- 11.3 Faculty Committees with responsibility to address RPL matters faculty level;
- 11.4 Institutional RPL working group;
- 11.5 Assessment and Moderator system;
- 11.6 Training of staff;
- 11.7 Verification procedure in faculties;
- 11.8 Written policy, procedures, student guidelines and Lecturer manual;
- 11.9 The UJ Quality Promotion Policy and Plan.

## **12. REVIEW OF POLICY**

The Policy will be reviewed in 2016.

## **13. POLICY DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Once approved by Senate, the Policy will be placed on the Intranet.

In addition, the Processes (in the Appendix) detail the need to make information about the RPL processes at UJ widely available to possible applicants, by means of brochures and information available on the UJ website.

Approved by the Senate on 17 November 2011





# **RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING: APPENDIX TO THE RPL POLICY**

**Approved: Senate of 14 November 2013**

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# RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING:

## Appendix to the RPL policy

### 1. CONTEXT AND PURPOSE

The University of Johannesburg states in the recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy that the University accepts RPL as an integral part of the academic programme and as an initiative to support transformation of the education and training system in South Africa. The University acknowledges that all learning has value and accepts the challenge to assess prior learning. The University will award *recognition* and, where appropriate, *credit* that is aligned to UJ programmes in order to promote lifelong learning. This is reflected in the vision and mission of the University.

The purpose of this document is to provide support to academic and support staff involved in the RPL processes.

### 2. WHAT IS RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING?

RPL is “the comparison of previous learning and experience of a student, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specific qualification and the acceptance of such learning for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements” (SAQA Regulation 452, No 18787, March 1998:5).

RPL defined in the UJ context refers to learning from experience, i.e. work experience, in-service training, self-study or life experience such as voluntary or community work. It therefore, involves the recognition of relevant knowledge and skills that can lead to access to a university learning programme or to credits for a module.

### 3. WHAT IS NOT RPL?

Requests for services that do not qualify as RPL should be directed to the appropriate person(s) in the faculty or department or University. The following requests do NOT qualify as RPL and are not addressed in this document:

- *Status for a qualification obtained outside South Africa.*

If the applicant has an existing qualification (from another higher education institution) and would like to continue his/her studies in the same discipline, he/she does not go through the RPL process. He/she should approach the Head of the Department directly.

- *Credits for a module completed at another university.*

The applicant has successfully completed a module as part of another programme at this University or as part of a programme offered by another South African University. The applicant now requests the recognition of the credits for this module as part of a different programme in this Faculty at UJ. This request should be referred to the head of the department.

However, if the applicant claims that he/she has achieved the module outcomes through experience (i.e. not through formal studies); a formal RPL assessment may be conducted to assess the student's competence in a particular module.

- *Obtaining a qualification without registering for it.*

RPL is not a process whereby the applicant can obtain a qualification without registering and studying for it. The applicant can gain access to a programme through RPL, but a qualification is not granted on the basis of RPL alone. Only status is granted as part of the access to a programme, e.g. an Hons is required to access a Master's programme. If the applicant is assessed through an RPL process and deemed to meet the entrance requirements, the Hons status (not the qualification) is granted on condition that the applicant continues his/her Master's studies at UJ.

#### **4. WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES OF RPL?**

The following principles are applicable to RPL practices at the University:

- (a) Recognition of prior learning allows access to further (under- and post-graduate) study by granting the status, but not the award, of the prerequisite qualification.
- (b) The UJ does not accept any form of RPL assessment undertaken by any other institution.
- (c) Any recognition of prior learning granted is valid only for the period specified by the Faculty.
- (d) Admission to the UJ, based on RPL, is subject to the rules and regulations of the University.
- (e) Recognition is given only for current competence, as determined by the Faculty.
- (f) RPL is programme-specific; recognition is given only for learning that is aligned to the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a specific programme or module, and not primarily the content.
- (g) Applicants are exposed to a formal RPL process that usually involves a lengthy process that may even take up to a year – it is not a not a single event.
- (h) The applicant has to provide evidence (e.g. portfolios, challenge examinations etc.) that must be assessed as relevant, sufficient and current. Where applicable, the evidence should be verified by the candidate's employer.
- (i) Quality assurance processes guarantee the integrity and credibility of all aspects of the RPL process.
- (j) Non-refundable application and assessment fees are payable for RPL.

- (k) The UJ Assessment Policy applies to all RPL assessment with special reference to moderation.
- (l) If the applicant is not satisfied with the outcome of any stage of the RPL process, s/he can appeal the process.
- (m) Once registered, the applicant becomes a member of the student body and all academic rules and regulations apply.

## **5. GENERAL INFORMATION ON RPL**

Applicants often come with misconceptions and/or high expectations of what RPL can do for them. The following information should be communicated to the applicants:

- (a) RPL is a lengthy process, not a single action. Depending on the level of study, it can take many months to go through the RPL process.
- (b) Applicants have to submit their applications well in advance (see Outline of the Process below).
- (c) To go through the whole RPL process will require the payment of different fees (see Outline of the Process below).
- (d) The applicant cannot obtain a qualification through RPL - only through the successful completion of the programme will a student obtain a qualification.
- (e) The UJ does not accept any previous RPL assessments that may have been done at or by another institution, regardless of why or when such assessments may have been done

## **6. OUTLINE OF PROCESS**

There is no single process that can be put into place that will address all potential cases of RPL. The RPL process can be expected to deal with several different categories of applicants, namely:

- (a) Enquiries from individuals who have heard of RPL, do not know what it entails and who want to find out whether it applies to them or not.
- (b) Applicants who have just left school and who have erroneously indicated that they believe RPL is an avenue they can follow. They may have submitted their applications to the Student Enrolment Centre (SEC).
- (c) Applicants who have a vague idea what RPL is and would like to know more. They are likely to approach the SEC or the faculty/academic department.
- (d) Applicants who believe they know what RPL is and think they qualify, but do not know which faculty or qualification they want to enter. They are likely to approach the SEC.
- (e) Applicants, who believe they know what RPL is, think they qualify and know which faculty or qualification they want to enter – at undergraduate level. They are probably equally likely to approach the SEC or the faculty/academic department.

- (f) Applicants, who believe they know what RPL is, think they qualify and know which faculty or qualification they want to enter – at postgraduate level. They are much more likely to approach the faculty office or the specific department.
- (g) Applicants who have an incomplete qualification which they want to complete.

RPL applicants have to be advised to submit their applications timeously so that their assessments can be completed before the closing date for applications to the programme of their choice. They must be informed that closing dates are faculty and programme specific.

Depending on the level of familiarity with RPL of the applicant/potential applicant, there are different procedures that can be followed:

**Procedure 1: Enquiries received from persons who are unfamiliar with RPL and wish to know more**

- (a) Such enquiries will be referred to the SEC
- (b) The SEC will provide a guidebook for applicants which will explain what RPL is and what the process to enter RPL entails. The guidebook will contain information on application dates, the time an application is likely to take to be finalised, indicate that there are costs involved and give an overview of the faculties of the UJ, etc. (Faculties have to determine due dates, keeping in mind that the RPL applications should serve at the third faculty board meeting. The applications do not have to serve at Senate as indicated in the RPL Policy.)
- (c) A SEC staff member will be able to assist with enquiries and direct the applicant to the relevant faculty (and faculty officer).
- (d) The outcome of the interaction with the SEC will determine the next step/s to be taken. These would be termination of the enquiry by the applicant or on recommendation by the SEC; or a decision to continue with the application. If the applicant continues one of the procedures outlined below would be followed.

**Procedure 2: Applicants who have submitted applications for entry to UJ and who have erroneously indicated they would like to be admitted via RPL**

- (a) The applicant submits an application form to UJ (either electronically or in person) and indicates by a tick that he/she is interested in RPL.
- (b) He/she pays the application fee to SEC.
- (c) The SEC will determine from the application, or from the applicant if present in person, that the applicant is probably a recent school-leaver who is likely to have no appropriate work experience.
- (d) If the RPL indication was erroneous the applicant is informed, either in person or electronically, that the normal administrative process of dealing with applications will be followed.

**Procedure 3: Applicants who are unsure of how the whole RPL process functions and who would like to know more AND applicants who know what RPL is about and wish to submit an application.**

- (a) The applicant submits an application form to UJ (either electronically or in person) and indicates by means of a tick that he/she is interested in RPL.
- (b) He/she pays an application fee.
- (c) The SEC evaluates the application as to whether the applicant is an RPL case or not.
- (d) All applicants (potential RPL cases or not) must receive an acknowledgement of receipt of application. Details of applicants deemed to be RPL cases are sent, via ImageNow, to the appropriate faculty RPL officer.
- (e) The faculty RPL officer makes contact with the applicant and schedules a consultation.
- (f) At the consultation, the faculty RPL officer will ensure that the applicant is in the right faculty and will decide whether the application has enough merit to warrant proceeding or to turn the applicant away. Formal communication to the candidate, with reasons why a candidate was turned down or referred to another faculty, is sent out and recorded.
- (g) If the faculty RPL officer decides to proceed, the applicant will be referred to the HoD of the appropriate department, who will inform the applicant of the requirements for a preliminary assessment.
- (h) At, or after, the consultation with the HoD or designated staff member the applicant will have the opportunity to decide whether to proceed with the RPL application or not.
- (i) If the applicant decides not to proceed with the application, the process ends there. It is, however, recorded for reporting purposes.
- (j) If the applicant does decide to proceed the RPL assessment fee becomes payable.

Once this stage has been reached, all applicants are dealt with according to faculty specific processes. The following guidelines apply:

- (a) The applicant submits all the required evidence for RPL assessment, as instructed, to the faculty RPL officer or the relevant academic staff member(s). The evidence is then assessed by the relevant academic staff member(s) in the manner appropriate to the level of the relevant programme/module.
- (b) An acknowledgement of receipt of evidence must be issued. Applicants must be fully informed of the time required for the assessment which will be dependent on the academic level and the faculty-specific procedures.
- (c) Assessment is done by taking the following into consideration:
  - i) Experience cannot be interpreted as learning (on a particular HEQSF level) – formal assessment is required.
  - ii) Assessment is done by applying the assessment criteria of the module/programme to the evidence provided by the candidate. In the case of a challenge exam, the exam paper must be based on the assessment criteria.
  - iii) The standard/level of RPL assessment must be the same as for the relevant module/programme, but the assessment methodology may differ.
  - ii) Evidence must be relevant, current, authentic and valid.

- (d) The assessment outcome is done in terms of *successful* or *not successful*.
- (e) The outcomes of the all RPL assessments must serve at the faculty board.
- (f) The RPL officer records the outcome of the RPL assessment and communicates it to the candidate.



## **7. COMMENTS ON POSTGRADUATE APPLICANTS**

- (a) Applicants at postgraduate level usually know for which programme they want to enrol and in which faculty and are most likely to approach either the faculty RPL officer or a staff member in the relevant department.
- (b) It is likely that a preliminary informal screening of the applicant will have been done by involved staff members in the department. With regard to M and D studies, it is highly likely that prior enquiries would have been made and that some form of discussion within the department would already have taken place.
- (c) The HoD or probable supervisor would have had the opportunity to decide whether the applicant was likely to be accepted as a student. An applicant deemed unlikely to be accepted (for whatever reason, for example lack of competence, lack of space or facilities) could then have been dissuaded from proceeding with the application.
- (d) It means that by the time an application is submitted, an expectation of eventual acceptance on the part of the applicant would already exist.
- (e) For senior qualifications this process could well be condensed into an assessment process with the concurrence of the HoD and the probable supervisor.

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