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General Notice

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GENERAL NOTICE

NOTICE 298 OF 2002



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RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RPL SYSTEMS, PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES BY ETQAs, ASSESSORS AND PROVIDERS

DISCUSSION DOCUMENT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

This document was approved for release as a discussion document for public comment at the ETQA Sub-committee meeting of 19 February 2002.

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The closing date for comments is 2 April 2002

Submissions should be titled: Recognition of Prior Learning

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RPL SYSTEMS, PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES BY ETQAs, ASSESSORS AND PROVIDERS

A policy document (draft)

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ACRONYMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

APL	Assessment of Prior Learning
APEL	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning
CAEL	Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
CETA	Construction Education and Training Authority
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
EVC	Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Competenties
FET	Further Education and Training
FNTI	First Nations Technical Institute
GENFETQA	General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance body
HE	Higher Education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
MEIETB	Metal and Engineering Industries Education and Training Board
MERSETA	Metal, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
NDE	National Department of Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSB	National Standards Body
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa
PLA	Prior Learning Assessment
PLAR	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition
QMS	Quality Management Systems
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Assessment

is the process of gathering and weighing evidence in order to determine whether learners have demonstrated outcomes specified in unit standards and/or qualifications registered on the NQF. The generic assessor standard registered by SAQA entitled 'plan and conduct assessment of learning outcomes' outlines the process in detail. The management of assessment is the responsibility of providers.

Moderation

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

Verification

is the process by which the recommendations from the provider about the award of credits or qualifications to learners are checked. The generic assessor standard 'verify moderation of assessment' registered by SAQA outlines this process in detail. It is an ETQA function to verify the claims of providers that assessment has been properly conducted and moderated.

Evidence facilitation

is the process by which candidates are assisted to produce and organise evidence for the purpose of assessment. It is not an essential part of every assessment process, but is useful in many contexts, including PRL. The generic assessor standard 'facilitate the preparation and presentation of assessment evidence by candidates' currently being generated by the SGB outlines this process in detail.

RPL Advice and support services

are additional services needed for effective RPL which are not covered by the assessor standard or the evidence facilitator standard. These focus on assisting learners to make effective choices about available programmes, career and work related opportunities. Practitioners require a thorough knowledge of the relevant economic sector. They should be trained to identify skills, knowledge and other attributes developed outside formal knowledge systems, and to interact with cultural sensitivity.

Constituent

means belonging to the defined or delegated constituency of an organisation or body referred to in the SAQA ETQA Regulations. ETQAs have constituent providers, constituent learners and constituent assessors.

Registered constituent assessor and moderator

means a person who is registered by the relevant ETQA in accordance with criteria established for this purpose by SAQA to measure the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications. All ETQAs must have a register of assessors; they may also wish to have similar registers of moderators and verifiers.

Registered constituent verifiers

means persons placed on an official register by the relevant ETQA after meeting agreed criteria. Constituent verifiers may be contracted by the ETQA to carry out verification activities on its behalf in relation to the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for the development and implementation of quality RPL systems, services and programmes as an integrated feature of the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa. This document is a logical sequence to the policy document *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications (SAQA October 2001)*, and provides a more specialised set of criteria and guidelines relevant to assessments for the purposes of RPL. As such the document addresses the primary role and functions of accredited ETQAs, providers¹ and assessors in the design and implementation of RPL related assessments and in the development of RPL systems, instruments and procedures to ensure the integrity of the qualifications and standards registered on the NQF, and the integrity of the learners assessed against these standards and qualifications.

These guidelines are based on the principles and values underpinning transformation of the education and training system in South Africa. As such they start from the premise that assessment, like learning, is not simply a technical exercise. It is also a social activity located in a particular social context and bound by the principles of access, equity, and quality. This calls for an approach to the development of RPL policy and practices which explicitly address the visible and invisible barriers to learning and assessment for the vast majority of South Africans. Such an approach must increasingly generate the commitment of all role players to removing these barriers and to building a system that is visible, usable and widely recognised as an effective and creative vehicle for lifelong learning.

In formulating this document SAQA recognises the urgent need for strategies to accelerate the implementation of assessments for RPL purposes, and particularly for employed and unemployed adults² and youth in South Africa. Most of the SETAs have now tabled sector skills plans and it is clearly evident that the demand for RPL related services is going to escalate rapidly in the next few years, in some sectors more than others. It is against this background that this document seeks to elaborate the essential elements of an enabling policy framework for RPL - one that will assist the ETQAs and all role players to meet urgent short term needs, such as setting up the necessary assessment and quality systems, while at the same time laying the foundations for long term growth and development in the system as a whole.

DEVELOPING THIS DOCUMENT

This document has been developed through a SAQA-led process that included stakeholder participation, public inputs, and expert reviews.

¹ In this document the terms 'providers' includes all formal (public and private) education and training institutions, education and training centres located in the workplace, and independent assessment centres or other RPL service providers.

² In this document the term 'adult learners' is used as the reference to the majority of learners, including out-of-school youth, whose primary mode of learning is non-formal and experiential.

Firstly, a 'narrow' consultation was undertaken with representatives from Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), providers, employers and organised labour who have been involved in RPL related activities. The purpose of this consultation was to engage with a knowledgeable local cadre who were able to provide valuable suggestions on what to include in the formulation of criteria and guidelines for a policy on RPL quality assurance, derived from their experiences of the field.

Secondly, a 'broad' consultation was held with stakeholder representatives invited from provider institutions (both public and private) and umbrella organisations across all education bands, SETAs and ETQAs, organised labour, employers, Departments of Education and Labour, and other relevant and interested parties. This took the form of a workshop to review the first draft of the criteria and standards that had been developed at that stage.

Thirdly, a questionnaire dealing with various aspects of RPL implementation was developed and sent to ETQA managers for their comment and input.

Finally, a number of international experts in RPL were consulted at varying points in the process: at one of the workshops, in the design of the questionnaire, in the development of the draft criteria and standards, and in a review of an early draft of this document.

As such, this document is reflective of the views of a broad range of stakeholders and experts.

THE NEED FOR RPL POLICY AND PLANS

The inclusion of the principle of RPL is fundamental to the development of a new education and training system in South Africa. The principle has its origins in a number of pre-democracy projects and policy-making forums initiated by the trade union movement and the ANC in the late 1980s. The principle, which is set out in the *National Standards Bodies Regulations No 18787 of 28 March 1998*, is broadly stated as *'the giving of credit to what learners already know and can do regardless of whether this learning was achieved formally, informally or non-formally'*. This principle is rooted in an understanding of the need to recognise the contribution, knowledge and skills of those who built this country and struggled for its liberation, whilst at the same time opening up new pathways for their access to education and training opportunities which had been denied in the past.

It is worth reminding ourselves of some of the challenges facing the country as we move into the 21st century. These were recently articulated in the *Vhutsila*³ strategy, and include the inherited legacy of past inequalities: *'that there are 3 million skilled and highly skilled people as compared with 7 million people trapped in semi/unskilled work or unemployment. Of the more than four million plus people who are unemployed in South Africa, some 50 % are young people who have completed more than nine years of schooling'*.

Collectively, this represents a large learner constituency with a very diverse range of formal and experiential learning backgrounds. Most of these learners have had very limited opportunities within the formal systems of schooling and workplace-based training. Many carry competencies forged in the production line, in survivalist-type jobs in the informal sector, and in the struggle to build new communities under conditions of severe poverty and isolation - a long way from the hallways of our traditional colleges, universities and technikons. Others carry a different but mixed bag of knowledge and skills, some of it at the equivalent of Level 2 and above on the NQF, some of it certificated, but often losing currency in a rapidly changing labour market. Learners in this category

³ Vhutsila is the Skills Development Strategy tabled by the Department of Labour in April 2001.

would include, to mention but a few examples, under-qualified teachers, enrolled nurses and primary health care workers, steel workers, mineworkers, builders, tyre builders, police men and women, underemployed youth, public service administrators and soldiers.

Seen against this background the need for a comprehensive and relevant RPL policy framework is particularly compelling. Such a framework has to give direction and coherence to all key institutions and role-players in the system. It has to generate consensus around the criteria and support systems within which the integrity and quality of all assessments will be protected while at the same time extending the opportunities and benefits of RPL to all learners and stakeholders.

The responsibility for the development of this framework lies in the first instance with the South African Qualifications Authority.

The Act (Section 2), outlines the objectives of the NQF as being to:

- (a) create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- (b) facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;
- (c) enhance the quality of education and training;
- (d) accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- (e) contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

As the agency responsible for ensuring that the above objectives are met, The Act further stipulates that the primary functions of SAQA are to:

- (a) oversee the development and implementation of the NQF;
- (b) formulate and publish policies and criteria for establishing and accrediting bodies that will facilitate the development of standards and qualifications, that is National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs);
- (c) accredit bodies responsible for the monitoring and auditing of the quality of learning and teaching provision for the achievement of registered standards and qualifications, that is ETQAs; and
- (d) ensure international comparability of registered standards and qualifications.

While the above framework and objectives of the NQF contextualises the implementation of RPL, it is the *National Standards Bodies Regulations No 18787 of 28 March 1998* that specifically refer to RPL. In defining RPL, the regulations state that:

“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”.

Furthermore, in terms of the requirements for the registration of qualifications, section 8(1)(a) of the regulations states that a qualification shall:

“indicate in the rules governing the award of the qualification that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes but is not limited to learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience.”

In terms of quality assurance of at sector and band levels, the *Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies Regulations No 19231 of 8 September 1998* specifies that ETQAs shall:

- (a) accredit constituent providers for specific standards or qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework;

- (b) promote quality amongst constituent providers;
- (c) monitor provision by constituent providers;
- (d) evaluate assessment and facilitation of moderation among constituent providers;
- (e) register constituent providers for specified registered standards or qualifications in terms of the criteria established for this purpose;
- (f) take responsibility for the certification of constituent learners;
- (g) co-operate with the relevant body or bodies appointed to moderate across Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies including but not limited to, moderating the quality assurance on specified standards or qualifications for which one or more Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies are accredited;
- (h) recommend new standards or qualifications to National Standards Bodies for consideration, or modifications to existing standards or qualifications to national Standards Bodies for consideration;
- (i) maintain a data-base acceptable to the Authority;
- (j) submit reports to the Authority in accordance with the requirements of the Authority; and
- (k) perform such other functions as may from time-to-time be assigned to it by the Authority.

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.

It is clear from both local and international experiences of RPL that the principles of equity, quality and redress, as stated in South Africa's new education and training policy and legislative framework, are objectives that need an explicit 'translation' into RPL practice if they are to be met. The Australian scenario, for example, demonstrates that a more equitable practice of RPL, and the hoped-for increasing access of Aboriginal people to mainstream education, has not taken place – old discriminations and exclusions continue to be practiced, both within institutions and workplaces with regard to education and training (Flowers and Hawke, 2000). A key challenge in South Africa will be to manage the diverse interests and expectations of the stakeholders who will participate in the field of RPL. This calls for a policy that provides direction and support for an evolving system of RPL that is able to go to scale in meeting the challenges of social, economic and human development while at the same time contributing to the overall development, quality and integrity of a National Qualifications Framework.

This document is one in a series that addresses key aspects related to the implementation of, and quality assurance and accreditation for, the NQF. This document should be consulted along with the *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*, *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* and (particularly) the *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment*.

STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

In formulating this RPL policy, the remaining chapters of this document:

- ❖ Identify key elements of a holistic and developmental approach to RPL in South Africa (Chapter 2);
- ❖ Establish a clear set of criteria against which the development and implementation of RPL practices can be measured within an evolving system of quality assurance established by the registered ETQAs and accredited training providers, moderators and assessors (Chapter 3).

- ❖ Provides a framework for the development of a strategy for the implementation of this strategy over the next five years (Chapter 4).
- ❖ Benchmark the development of RPL provision in South Africa against lessons drawn from a number of local and international models (Appendix C);

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS A HOLISTIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO RPL IN SOUTH AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

The case for a highly technical approach to RPL is often associated with the need to fast track the delivery of formal education and training opportunities to working and unemployed youth and adults. A case needs to be made for a different approach, one that takes into account the social as well as the technical challenges that face the country in building a new qualifications framework and in making it increasingly available to learners across the country. In this chapter the main reasons for such an approach are set out and the essential principles and elements that would constitute its full development and implementation in South Africa are identified.

RATIONALE

Conventional practices have tended to limit the scope of RPL to activities aimed at establishing the value and authenticity of evidence of qualification acquired in one institution or programme over and against those offered in another which the candidate learner is keen to acquire. Such an approach seeks the most effective and efficient ways in which applicants can access existing courses and qualifications. It places the emphasis for quality assurance on the development and moderation of procedures, methods and instruments of assessment that must be used in determining and recording the pre-existing competencies of learners against registered standards and qualifications. Under this model the assumption is that learners are sufficiently equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources to understand what is required and to prepare and produce the evidence necessary for the assessors to reach a determination of competence.

The reality in South Africa is that many adults and youth have never been part of the formal education system or have been out of the system for a long time. This should not be read to mean that most learners have no knowledge or ability to learn within their own communities of practice, rather that they are more likely to be unfamiliar with the language, format and content of qualifications, unit standards and conventional methods of assessment. In addition, there are a range of social and personal barriers that result in high levels of stress and anxiety, much of it related to prior experiences of formal education and assessment. In this context we would argue that the focus for quality assurance, needs to ensure that the preconditions and strategies for assessment in both workplaces and institutions are developed and applied in a manner that is responsive to learners anxieties, to their knowledge and preferred methods of assessment. RPL needs to be highlighted as a category of assessment requiring a high degree of flexibility, sensitivity and specialisation, giving as much weight to the provision for learner support and preparation as it does to the preparation of assessment methods, instruments and administrative systems to record and protect the integrity of the results.

Further, most of our formal education institutions have traditionally taught school leavers, and their curriculum and pedagogical approaches are reflective of this. Many workplace-based assessors are appropriately qualified in their areas of functional expertise, but do not have educational qualifications appropriate to the needs and context of adult and experiential learning. In addition most assessors and learners in South Africa carry within them a range of biases which if not acknowledged and dealt with, tend to play themselves out in different ways in their assessment

practices. In both instances (institutional and workplace-based assessors) there is a strong case to be made for assessor training specially geared to prepare assessors for the contextual and methodological challenges that they will face in the South African situation.

Finally RPL is a set of educational and social practices, and not just a set of 'add-on' procedures. As with all education and training contexts and practices, different philosophical approaches, and their different implementation strategies influence the way RPL is conceptualised and put into practice. RPL is also, at a societal level, about privileging some forms of knowledge above others, and therefore reflects a particular relationship between knowledge and power (Harris 1999). Under the previous system, it was clear to see this relationship, and within the new education and training system, we have to systematically and consciously redefine how and which knowledges are valued in order to ensure that both old and new forms of discrimination are avoided. This means that we need to develop RPL practices that will reflect this approach, and that these practices do not merely become a technical application, dislocated from a particular individual and broader context.

KEY ELEMENTS

The arguments presented above point to the need for a holistic and developmental approach to RPL in South Africa and the consultations around the development of this policy document point to an increasing consensus in this regard. Such an approach constitutes the logical point of departure in the development of a policy framework for RPL in South Africa. While there is considerable agreement on the main elements of such an approach, the next three years will be critical in providing the space for all stakeholders to contribute to the further development and refinement of the approach in practice. The remainder of this chapter sets out the key elements of a holistic approach.

- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL subscribes to the principles and values of human development and lifelong learning. As such it consciously supports the social purposes of RPL in relation to access, equity, and redress, and strives to implement assessments in a manner that promotes dignity, confidence and educational opportunities for all learners. RPL should be made increasingly available and affordable to all candidates who request it. RPL should also be voluntary.
- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL consciously seeks to address the *context and conditions* that inform the practice of RPL: This means taking steps to remove the emotional, educational, cultural and economic factors that constitute barriers to effective learning and assessment practice. A holistic approach allocates high priority to the establishment of learner centred support systems and programmes necessary for the proper preparation and implementation of RPL in the workplace and in the formal institutions of learning. It locates RPL within a broader process of lifelong learning, where individualised career-pathing and educational planning are part of the services offered.
- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL takes as its starting point the standpoint of critical theory which challenges the social and structural conditioning of the curriculum, institutions and related opportunities for adult learners in formal education. RPL in this approach seeks not only to facilitate access to registered standards and qualifications, but will also increasingly challenge the construction and content of qualifications to be more *inclusive* of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are produced in communities of practice outside of the formal institutions of learning in society.

- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL recognises the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles which learners bring into an assessment situation. It subscribes to the principles of good assessment practice as formulated in the Act and in the registered generic assessor standard (ASSMT 01). As such it actively promotes the principle of flexibility in the use of assessment methods and instruments in accordance with the principles and the rights of RPL candidates to participate in the selection and use of assessment methods and instruments appropriate to their situation.
- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL is deeply committed to the development and maintenance of systems for assessment that protect the integrity of the standards, qualifications, and institutions which constitute the National Qualifications Framework in South Africa.
- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL is learner-centred and developmental. RPL is not only about assessment, but should be seen as a broader process that places the candidate at its centre. Thus, the RPL process should focus on preparing candidates, assessing what they do know (**not** penalising them for what they don't know) and then using that information to guide decisions around career-pathing and educational planning.
- ◆ A holistic approach to learning, teaching and assessment recognises that RPL should ideally be the first step into a learning programme that will build on the skills and knowledge already recognised and credited. Learning programmes should be flexible and rest on sound adult education principles and practices in order to maximise the learning and teaching process. Assessment within both the RPL process and learning programme itself needs to be flexible, participative and integrated.
- ◆ A holistic approach takes into account that there are different purposes for RPL, and candidates should be involved in deciding the purpose for which they are undertaking RPL. While the purposes for RPL may vary, providers are encouraged to use the national standards and outcomes (including critical cross-field outcomes) as the benchmarks framing the RPL advising and assessment process. The different purposes for RPL may include candidates wanting:
 - personal development and/or certification of current skills without progression into a learning programme, if the candidate so chooses;
 - progression onto a learning programme, using RPL to fast-track their progression through the learning programme;
 - promotion;
 - career or job change.
- ◆ A holistic approach to RPL seeks to realise real benefits to all stakeholders who support its implementation by:
 - being cost effective for employers and employees in reducing the costs of training for those parts of a qualification that the employee already knows, and in maximising the returns to investment in appropriate programmes of education and training;
 - enhancing the self esteem and confidence of learners in the recognition of their skills, knowledge and competencies against registered standards and qualifications. This provides the motivation to return to learning in order to complete qualifications;
 - increasing participation rates in skills programmes, learnerships and programmes offered at formal learning institutions. This in turn should create a greater level of responsiveness and revenue for providers; and
 - promoting real economic and social benefits in workplaces and communities.

CREATING A SYSTEMIC ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR RPL IMPLEMENTATION

A holistic approach to RPL requires an enabling policy environment and the ETQAs have a primary role to play in this regard. While the holistic approach represents both a compelling vision and an important starting point for the development of RPL policy in South Africa, we are very aware that its full development will take time, and is crucially dependent on building the capacity and dedicated resources for its implementation. This suggests a **developmental and incremental strategy** in which the ETQAs will play a primary role in the creation of systems and the provision of resources for capacity building. Linked to this will be the development of a national cost-effective and sustainable funding strategy for RPL, as providers will need support in carrying out government's mandate. Ultimately, all stakeholders will need to define their contribution in relation to this strategy and develop plans and milestones against which to measure progress over agreed time frames. ETQAs will play a vital role in promoting the strategy within each sector or band, and in creating the essential quality management systems within which the proper monitoring and evaluation of this strategy is conducted at all levels in the system.

A national strategy with regard to resource allocation may be to adopt models of regional collaboration where networks of advisors and assessors are available for different providers, workplaces and institutions, and where materials are developed collectively for these networks. Different models, such as the possibility of setting up regional RPL assessment centres serving FET or HE related qualifications and contexts, could be explored and piloted (see ppendix C on international models for two examples of regional RPL provisioning).

CHAPTER 3:

CRITERIA FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR RPL IN SOUTH AFRICA

The following criteria have been developed as a guide for the development of a system of quality assurance in respect of all RPL related programmes and services provided by ETQAs and accredited training providers and assessors in South Africa. The criteria have been formulated with reference to the SAQA Act and all related policy, legislation and regulations, the holistic approach outlined in Chapter 2 and the lessons learnt from emerging models in South Africa and internationally (Appendix C).

This chapter sets out to discuss and clarify the quality statements and criteria. The purpose of each quality statement is to indicate the broad goal for each area of practice within the broader RPL process⁴. Each criterion is an indicator that, taken collectively, should achieve the broader goal of each implementation area as stated in the quality statement.

1. INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND ENVIRONMENT

There is a shared commitment on the part of accredited providers, workplaces and ETQAs to provide enabling environments for learning and assessment, inclusive of close cooperation between administration, learning facilitators, evidence facilitators, advisors, assessors, moderators professional organisations, employers, trade unions and communities.

- Accredited institutions, providers and workplaces have RPL policies and plans that show an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion.
- Accredited, institutions, providers and workplaces have RPL policy, planning and management structures that operate in accordance with the criteria included in these guidelines and other relevant policy and legislation e.g. the Skills Development Act, the Employment Equity Act, etc.
- Information about RPL services and programmes is widely available and actively promoted to prospective candidates.
- Admissions procedures and systems are user friendly and inclusive of learners with diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational backgrounds and indigenous knowledge.
- Equal access to opportunities for advice, support, time and resources are ensured for all RPL candidates.
- Access to quality advising and assessment opportunities in the workplace is made possible through company policies which ensure that evidence facilitators, advisors, assessors and moderators are given sufficient time, resources and recognition for their services.
- Wherever possible, providers and ETQAs promote regional integration and collaboration among institutions, professional bodies, workplaces in the provision of RPL services and programmes to learners in the region.
- Formal agreements between providers, workplaces and ETQAs ensure effective validation, articulation, and recognition of assessment information and results.
- Where admissions requirements govern entry into learning programmes, the provider indicates to the ETQA how relevant rules and regulations have been changed or modified to accommodate RPL applications (or why this has not been done).

⁴ The way each quality statement and its criteria are phrased does not mean that these practices already exist in South Africa.

This category highlights the fact that the institutional or workplace context creates an enabling environment demonstrating commitment to RPL at all levels. Various projects have demonstrated that unless proper policies, structures and provision for time and resources are allocated to RPL, the services will be undervalued and under-provided, and RPL easily becomes an area of contestation and conflict.

It is recognised that, the cost effectiveness of RPL provisioning is an area for urgent and ongoing research and development. The next few years will be critical in promoting models for the delivery of quality RPL programmes and services on a scale that is cost effective and efficient. Chapter 3 highlighted two different models that begin to demonstrate the possibilities and benefits of regional and sectoral collaboration in this regard.

2. SERVICES AND SUPPORT TO LEARNERS

Through properly conducted evidence facilitation and advice and support services learners are able to see how to use RPL to achieve their personal, educational and career goals. They are also assisted in dealing with personal, social and technical barriers to learning, and in the preparation of evidence to back up their application for RPL assessment.

- Advising programmes and services assist learners to make effective choices about available programmes, career and work related opportunities.
- Advising programmes and services, such as those of the evidence facilitator, provide assistance to learners in preparing for assessment. Structured short courses (such as the portfolio development course or the experiential learning course) or articulation-based courses in further and higher education institutions are increasingly available to learners wanting to access programmes in these institutions.
- Learner support and services are designed to remove time, place and other barriers, so that candidate learners can succeed in achieving their goals.
- Evidence facilitators will add value to the assessment process by ensuring candidates are ready to present well organised and complete evidence to registered assessors. Their value will be particularly felt when assisting candidates who are competent in their field, but are unable to present coherent evidence of that fact for reasons unrelated to their skill area.

The context of practice and quality assurance in this area relates to the fact that most adult learners in South Africa have very little information on the nature and form of RPL opportunities available to them at work or through the formal provider institutions. In addition many have very negative prior experiences of assessment at school and at work, and many workers see little if any benefit arising from their pursuit of further learning and qualifications. Issues relating to a lack of self-confidence, or negative and discriminatory education experiences often impact on an RPL candidate's success in the assessment. (These experiences may impact on their willingness to participate in RPL at all). Also, affective and emotional factors also play a role: these learners often come with particular issues (eg family crises, divorce, retrenchment, etc) that may hamper their concentration and ability to deal with the issue at hand, thus, in addition to evidence facilitation, the advising services that are available need to include counselling services and a more holistic approach to learning and assessment.

The above areas form part of the pre-assessment advice and counselling, as does structured preparation for the assessment itself, and educational planning, which also continues after the assessment has been completed. Assessment counselling and support would thus include educational planning and support where an RPL candidate proceeds onto a learning programme. Post-

assessment support (including emotional support) should be provided to RPL candidates who are found to be 'not yet competent', and plans for further training and reassessment should be provided.

One of the critical areas relating to orientation and services is the quality assurance thereof. If the nature and quality of the advising and services is not adequate, participation and completion rates for RPL candidates will fall. Providers will be encouraged to develop programmes and materials for candidate preparation, and to ensure that these are fully reviewed and monitored in the systems for quality assurance. Services need to be provided with sufficient flexibility so as to ensure that they remain available to accommodate the particular pressures facing adults at work (e.g. shift workers) and at home.

Further, in providing RPL services and learning programmes for adults, a flexible learning environment needs to be developed to accommodate the particular pressures facing adults many of whom will be working. They cannot always afford the luxury of too much time or money spent on gathering and presenting evidence of attending learning programmes.

3. TRAINING AND REGISTRATION OF ASSESSORS AND KEY PERSONNEL, SUCH AS SUPPORT STAFF AND ADVISORS, WHO ARE CENTRAL TO THE RPL PROCESS

Training of assessors and other personnel involved in RPL is a key element in ensuring the quality of assessments and in the provision of assessment services to learners. Training enables all those involved in the advising and assessment process, including evidence facilitators, assessors, moderators, advisors and administrative personnel to provide a holistic, learner-centred RPL service that is in keeping with the objectives of the NQF and related policies. Providers of training are critical to the development of all key RPL personnel and as such should be particularly vigilant in meeting the criteria and procedures for quality assurance as laid out in this document and in the policies of their constituent ETQAs. ETQAs in their turn must develop and monitor policies for the accreditation of training providers and the registration of assessors and moderators, that include provision for regular updating of their professional competencies in RPL related services and programmes.

- ETQAs are proactive in stimulating the provision of training programmes for all key personnel involved in RPL related services to learners.
- ETQAs ensure that the criteria for the registration of moderators and assessors makes explicit provision for the requisite certification and ongoing professional development of all personnel involved in assessment and RPL related services
- ETQAs utilise the criteria for accreditation to ensure that training programmes for all categories of personnel involved in the RPL services are designed and delivered in accordance with the relevant principles and standards for assessment and moderation as set out in SAQA and other policy documents.
- ETQAs utilise the criteria for accreditation to ensure that evidence facilitators and advisors involved in the RPL services are trained and certificated in the relevant unit standards designed for that purpose, in accordance with the relevant principles and standards for assessment and moderation as set out in SAQA and other policy documents.
- Quality assurance systems are implemented by all training providers to ensure that they increasingly meet the developmental objectives of a holistic approach to RPL in South Africa.
- All those involved in moderation and verification activities ensure that they sustain the currency of their knowledge and skills in RPL assessments. The training and development of RPL personnel encourages mentoring relationships between staff with and those without RPL expertise.

- The functions of assessment and advising should be clearly defined and should not be performed by the same person in situations where this would jeopardise the principles of fair assessment.
- ETQAs develop procedures and mechanisms to review the practices and registration status of individual assessors who do not meet the required levels of quality.

The training and orientation of assessors and other staff involved in RPL has been identified as a critical component of a successful implementation strategy. Training should not only be provided for assessors, but for all staff (including administrative, support and call-centre staff, for example) who are involved in the implementation of RPL, although in terms of current practice it is only assessors who must be formally accredited.

The tasks of evidence facilitation, advising and assessment are critical and distinctive in the provision for RPL services to candidate learners. In cases of summative and integrated assessments the *roles* of evidence facilitator, advisor and assessor should be kept separate, in order to avoid a potential conflict of interest and bias. However, it will always be necessary for there to be a close consultative relationship between RPL candidate, the evidence facilitator, the advisor and assessor, so that, for example, assessment criteria are agreed to in a transparent fashion, otherwise discrepancies between the advising process and assessment outcome may arise.

Assessor, evidence facilitator and advisor training should include a component on the development of self-awareness, sensitivity and the ability to know and manage one's own biases. This is included in the national unit standard for assessors, but needs to be carefully monitored when accrediting trainers of assessors. Whilst the critical areas of bias in South Africa focus on issues relating to race, language, gender and class, there are also numerous other biases, including the bias against experiential and non formal sources of knowledge and learning. Biases are also perpetuated in the structures of employment and accountability within organisations, for example, a shop steward and a manager have different pressures on them as they struggle to be fair in an assessment situation.

Anti-bias and sensitivity training needs to emphasise an understanding of these problems and the ways in which they impact on assessment activities, relationships and processes. Training needs to include an explicit component on language bias – assessors need to be vigilant that learners have access to translators or co-assessors who are proficient in the learner's language of choice. Also, assessors need to guard against assessing the language skills of learners in contexts where they are supposed to be assessing *other* learning outcomes.

Another critical area that training programmes and assessors themselves need to develop is how to make the unit standards/learning outcomes accessible to learners. Very often, learners struggle to identify their prior learning and match this to existing standards or outcomes. Assessment instruments developed by providers and workplace-based assessors need to come under the same scrutiny to ensure that they are also designed to enhance an open and fair assessment for candidates. It needs to be remembered that many learners acquired their knowledge and skills in contexts and settings removed from the national standards setting processes.

Chapter 5 of *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (SAQA 2001) provides a detailed explication of the role and expertise of assessors in general. This is also applicable to RPL assessors, with any caveats presented in this section.

4. METHODS AND PROCESSES OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment for the purposes of RPL is a systematic, flexible, collaborative and transparent process involving the learner and assessor within a specific context and site, such as the workplace or institution of education and training. ETQA registered moderators and verifiers are key role players in the final determination of what methods and instruments are used, how they are used, the decisions concerning candidates' competence, and that the processes of assessments are consistent and fair to all candidates.

- Assessor and learner identify the purpose of assessment and clarify the expectations of the learner. This informs the assessment plan that identifies the form, quality, and sources of evidence to be collected for example, performance evidence, knowledge evidence, witness testimony. Also the form and quality of support to be provided to the learner in preparing for the assessment and the costs thereof.
- The learner is an active participant in all aspects of the assessment process, such as identifying and collecting evidence, determining location and time of assessment, negotiating the provision for special needs.
- Assessment plans indicate that a variety of assessment methods and instruments are available to validate diverse types of learning, and this should include self-assessments. Background information about the appropriate methods and instruments are be provided.
- Assessment instruments and exemplars are developed and moderated in compliance with SAQA and ETQA approved principles and standards of good practice of good assessment.
- The choice of assessment methods is appropriate and fit for purpose, and ensures reliable and valid assessment outcomes. Assessors are sensitive to context and language of the RPL candidate when choosing or recommending assessment methods and instruments. Evidence collected in support of experiential learning from whatever sources, is evaluated in terms of the principles of good assessment practice.
- Assessment plans and procedures are implemented in a fair and transparent fashion and every effort is identify and reduce barriers that may disadvantage the candidate or undermine the integrity of the assessors.
- Assessors complete assessment reports that indicate: the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome, and the suggestions for further learning in cases where gaps have been identified.
- All assessment activities, processes and documents are subject to moderation in accordance with rules and regulations promulgated by the relevant SETAs. Learners are informed of the final results of the assessment as soon as all moderation procedures are complete, and this should be done as soon as possible after the actual assessment.
- Learners have the right to appeal against both the process and outcomes of the RPL assessment, and appeal procedures must be implemented in a fair and transparent fashion.
- The assessment process includes the development of a plan to identify gaps in skills/knowledge, a process for addressing the gap, and an opportunity for reassessment, where indicated.
- In the final analysis ETQAs are responsible for the verification, evaluation and quality assurance of all assessments and assessment systems.

Chapter 3 of the *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (SAQA 2001) provides a detailed discussion of the principles of good assessment. These principles are fairness, validity, reliability, and practicability, and apply to all assessment including those done for the purposes of RPL. These principles constitute the heart of good practice and must be applied in the design and implementation of all assessment methods and procedures.

The challenges of assessment for purposes of RPL are relatively straight forward when candidates hold certificates of prior learning or are performing functions at work that directly correspond to

outcomes specified in registered standards and qualifications. They are greatest when the knowledge and skills of candidates is not certificated and is rooted in prior experiential learning that does not show a direct correspondence to the outcomes specified in registered standards and/or qualifications. In many cases adult learners will have completed short courses or skills programmes which can be validated against registered standards and qualifications, but this requires time and resources which may not be available to individual applicants. In other cases, assessors may need to draw heavily on the assistance of outside experts to assist them in making decisions concerning the nature, level and equivalence of the knowledge and skills of candidates.

Quality of evidence relates to reliability, validity, authenticity, sufficiency, and currency. Particularly in RPL assessment, the latter two issues of quality are important. In the case of sufficiency, it is not only a question of whether enough evidence has been gathered. Sometimes, in an attempt to ensure rigour, assessors require too much evidence (eg extensive triangulation) and thus make the assessment process very onerous for candidates. Currency too is an important issue in RPL assessments as candidates have sometimes learnt skills a long time ago; how current certain knowledge, skills and competencies need to be are largely dependent on context and occupational area.

An important responsibility for the assessor is to ensure that an assessment plan is developed in a manner that meets the needs and circumstances of each candidate whilst at the same time addressing the specified assessment criteria of the relevant unit standard or qualification. The assessment plan not only serves to record the interaction between assessor and candidate, but also records the assessment process itself. This serves as an important source of information both for the moderation process and for any appeals that may be lodged. Assessors should ensure that as much information as possible is captured of meetings, issues relating to points of clarification and so on, as well as the information highlighted in the criteria above.

An issue relevant to RPL candidates who may want to access learning programmes after their RPL assessment relates to the timing of the assessment, so that candidates do not miss the start of their learning programmes, etc. Providers are encouraged to provide services and assessments at times that take into account the start of learning programmes or the academic year, depending on the level of study.

The appeals procedure is not discussed here but readers are referred to Chapter 6 of *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (SAQA 2001) for a detailed discussion thereof.

5. RPL AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

RPL principles increasingly inform the development of new standards, qualifications, programmes and curriculum. Providers use multiple methods of instruction and delivery including experiential and problem-based methods, in order to provide curriculae to meet the diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational needs of adult learners. The decision of what should be included and assessed in new qualifications and programmes takes into account the nature and form of knowledge produced in previously excluded constituencies and locations, eg indigenous knowledge, women's knowledge, workers' knowledge. Decisions in this regard are taken by the relevant structures of providers in consultation with representative stakeholders, NSBs and the ETQAs.

- The design of learning programmes indicates how learners' prior learning has been affirmed and taken into account. Assessment strategies are designed to help learners meet their learning goals.
- The curriculum is flexible enough to accommodate learners' prior learning, as well as their

individualised educational plans and goals.

- The curriculum incorporates indigenous and other knowledge forms in order to reflect the diversity of needs and goals of the learner population.
- Learners are provided with flexible entry and exit points within learning programmes, to enhance convenient access to education and to achieve their learning/career goals as efficiently and conveniently as possible.
- Trends emerging from RPL assessments, where such trends have implications for the modification and redesign of unit standards/qualifications, are forwarded to ETQAs by providers, and ETQAs consolidate such areas across their sectors and forward with recommendations to the relevant NSB.
- Where RPL candidates demonstrate knowledge (such as indigenous knowledge), skills and competencies that do not easily 'fit' existing unit standards, it should be possible for providers to assess such knowledge and to provide credit equivalencies on the recommendation of assessors in consultation with subject experts and the relevant ETQA.

The criteria under this quality statement refer to two 'moments' of recognition within RPL. The first relates to what knowledge is assessed and recognised during the RPL process itself. This can generate considerable difficulty in the assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes that do not directly match outcomes specified in registered qualifications or unit standards. For example indigenous knowledge, or experiential learning generated in work related processes that do not match the outcomes specified in elective unit standards.

The second 'moment' of recognition occurs when RPL candidates enter into learning programmes in order to further their education (this point relates to criteria 3-6). Many institutions offer learning programmes and curriculae that are inflexible and that do not cater for the needs of individual learners, particularly adults who already have certain levels of knowledge that the average school-leaver does not. Institutions will need to find ways of becoming more flexible in design and delivery of the curriculum to allow for learner participation in the final selection of courses and modules in a qualification.

These issues are fundamental to the debate in RPL in terms of whose knowledge and what knowledge is regarded as valuable and worth recognising; and whether learning generated in situations outside of the specified range or context in which the assessment is being done will be recognised. A system that inflexibly assesses RPL candidates only against pre-determined standards, or against standards that are narrowly relevant to a particular job, can undermine the purposes and principles of RPL, both as a strategy for redressing some of the injustices of the past, as well as for recognising the 'whole' person. These issues are pertinent to both workplace and institutional contexts – but it has been demonstrated internationally that it is possible to meet both objectives, ie a holistic approach and an assessment of context relevant knowledge, skills and competencies.

Most international practice uses the portfolio method in order to assist RPL candidates in developing a holistic and well-rounded picture of themselves, their career and their lifelong learning achievements. This includes a reflection on all the contexts and areas of experiential, community and workplace learning. Aspects of this learning are then further developed for the purposes of assessment against specified criteria (such as those specified in the outcomes of registered unit standards and qualifications). However, this requires more time upfront for RPL candidates, and also requires related support services. The demonstrated benefits include adult learners with enhanced self-esteem and feelings of increased self-worth, and this in turn translates into more motivated and successful learners, more motivated and productive workers, and citizens with a deeper commitment to a democratising society still engaged in reconstruction and development.

6. QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Quality management systems and processes are vital elements in the continuous development and provision of RPL services and programmes to the adult learner. Reporting and record-keeping should be designed as an integral part of the QMS, to inform strategic planning requirements at national, sectoral and provider levels, and to sustain the critical integrity of the whole system.

Quality systems and processes

- Quality management systems for RPL are designed, documented, and implemented at national, sector, and provider levels in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications.
- Quality management systems use the information gained from the system to evaluate and refine RPL policy, procedures, programmes and services at all levels and to plan for further development aimed at meeting RPL targets for delivery.
- Quality management systems are inclusive of all key stakeholders in the RPL process, including representatives from the learner/candidate community. Roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders and structures are clearly defined in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity.
- ETQAs provide development support to assist accredited providers, workplaces and all key personnel to install and operate quality management systems in accordance with agreed criteria and specifications.
- Evaluation and monitoring activities are clearly spelt out in the QMS documentation. These include diagnostic, formative and summative activities.
- ETQAs provide clear guidelines to ensure that accredited providers and workplaces operate management systems for RPL that are internally consistent, and meet the criteria and specifications for quality assurance as set out in their sector specific policies and regulations.

Records and Reports

- RPL documentation, reports, and sources of evidence are maintained in accordance with the ETQA approved criteria and specifications for quality management of all RPL data. Providers and employers must therefore ensure that responsibility for the administration of this is a dedicated function within the organisation.
- Providers must ensure that all RPL results are recorded in accordance with the requirements of SAQA's National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) and the constituent ETQA.
- RPL credits should be recorded in the normal transcription mode of the provider, ie RPL credit should 'look like' other credits.
- Information on RPL outcomes for all candidates, including unsuccessful and successful applications, must be maintained in accordance with SAQA and ETQA regulations.
- Systems to monitor the progress of RPL candidates who enter learning programmes post-RPL assessment should be implemented as part of the QMS at provider institutions.
- Providers should include an holistic analysis of RPL services and results in the quality assurance reports to ETQAs. ETQAs likewise should include these reports in a similar format when they report to SAQA.

The integrity and development of a holistic approach to RPL requires a comprehensive system of quality assurance. Ultimate responsibility for the design and monitoring of this system rests with the constituent ETQAs and accredited providers. Such a system includes the elaboration of standards for the effective management, implementation, moderation and review of all RPL services and programmes, including the secure production, storage and distribution of all records, reports and other data relevant to the assessment and recognition of prior learning. Trained personnel using proper procedures for verification and moderation are vital to the proper functioning of a quality

management system. Chapter 7 of *Criteria and Guidelines for Assessment of NQF Registered Unit Standards and Qualifications* (SAQA 2001) provides a detailed discussion of moderation.

The intention is that RPL forms part of providers' and ETQAs' overall QMS, in order to facilitate and streamline all moderation, management, and reporting procedures. The intention is not that RPL requires a system of its own but should be properly integrated into credible quality management systems that prevail in the workplace and in the provider institutions. Responsibility for ensuring proper consistency and alignment between the different systems of providers, workplaces, their own systems, and those of SAQA rest with the constituent ETQAs.

Internal and external evaluation should form a critical part of the review and quality improvement process. There are three levels of evaluation with different purposes:

- Formative: This occurs at micro-levels of the system throughout the process, eg during the advising phase candidates and advisors review process, materials, etc, in order to effect changes to these products and services.
- Summative: Overall evaluation of the degree to which goals and targets have been met, once the RPL process cycle has been completed.
- Diagnostic: Occurs at both formative and summative stages, so that changes to the process can happen at various points in the cycle, as appropriate.

In addition, the following points should be borne in mind when considering quality assurance and evaluation:

- Quality assurance for RPL must fit into existing structures and systems for assessment, learner support and advising, delivery of learning programmes, etc.
- It is recommended that the process be reliant on evaluation processes and feedback loops at all points – from those staff members involved in RPL, to learners who go through RPL, to other stakeholders who may direct interest in the process, eg, employers, trade unions, student representative councils, professional bodies, etc.
- Some evaluation is continuous, for example, every learner who goes through one-on-one advising or a portfolio workshop (or similar) is requested to fill out an evaluation form at that point, and the same would apply to assessment, and so on.

It will be the responsibility of the ETQAs and providers' to monitor RPL policies against their actual practice. Further, ETQAs with their access to many providers, should be able to collate information across the providers in the sector, to make recommendations for improvement and consistency across the system, and to provide coherent reports to SAQA.

Although the NLRD specifies clearly what information will be required from ETQAs and providers, for the purposes of RPL additional information is required so that a research base that examines RPL implementation and its efficacy is developed. We need to learn more about RPL candidates in South Africa, in order to inform the transformation of teaching and learning practices in relation to adult learners. Thus, the research component will be vital to all stakeholders, from SAQA, to ETQAs and providers, to learners and to trade unions.

The requirement that RPL assessments are recorded in the same manner as conventional assessment outcomes is to prevent a situation, in contexts where non-formal learning is viewed as inferior to conventional learning contexts, where RPL assessment is not accepted by providers as a legitimate reflection of a learners' knowledge, skills and competencies. This highlights the importance of the systemic quality management of RPL systems, so all stakeholders will have faith in RPL assessment across the board.

7. FEES AND FUNDING FOR RPL SERVICES

Fees and funding arrangements for the delivery and administration of RPL services should not create barriers for learners. Dedicated funding is required to ensure the development of quality systems and capacity to make RPL services and programmes affordable and effective across all levels and sectors in South Africa.

- The fees per module/course for RPL assessments should be less than the cost of taking the module/course on a full-time basis.
- Credit-bearing portfolio development and other articulation programmes are made increasingly available and affordable to assist learners in the preparation for assessment, and to qualify for available subsidies for selected skills programmes and learnerships.
- Providers provide flexible payment options, which reflect the individual needs of the learner. This information must be provided to learners.
- ETQAs, in consultation with their constituent SETAs, must establish priorities for the development and funding of systems, personnel and programmes in accordance with the aims and objectives of holistic approach to RPL in the sector. Research and development priorities should be identified, including those that investigate costs and cost effectiveness.

The development of a holistic approach to RPL in South Africa cannot happen at any level without the requisite allocation of resources. The costs of developing systems and capacity must be seen as a serious investment in the development of a lifelong learning system in South Africa. The principles and vision of a holistic approach to RPL should inform the decision to allocate targeted funding for this purpose. ETQAs, in conjunction with their respective SETAs, providers, members, and government should take the lead in generating financial support for RPL services at all levels in the system, to ensure that the costs of RPL do not become an insurmountable barrier to the majority of adult learners in South Africa. Funding for RPL should be extended to ensure adequate provision for ongoing research and development activities inclusive of studies focused on the costs and cost effectiveness at all levels in the system.

CHAPTER 4

A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION

There can be little doubt that the impact of new policies and strategies initiated by government and SAQA over the last eight years have substantially enhanced the scope and commitment to RPL related programmes and services throughout the country. Recent research reports, publications and conferences are ample evidence of an emerging consensus around a holistic model and vision for RPL as outlined in the first section of this report. This document offers a set of guidelines and criteria against which to formulate a more detailed strategy to expand and include quality RPL services and programmes as part of the growth and development of the National Qualifications Framework.

Such a strategy cannot be developed and implemented at the national level alone – in fact it would need to be elaborated and implemented by all key stakeholders in the system – ETQAs, accredited providers and workplaces, verifiers, moderators, assessors, advisors, administrators and managers.

To this end, we suggest that the building blocks of such a strategy, inclusive of the role that SAQA and its registered ETQAs would have to play in its development and implementation over the next five years, are as follows:

- An audit of current practice against the vision for a holistic approach and the criteria listed in this policy. The quality statements and criteria have been turned into a self-audit tool (attached as Appendix A), as an example of how **providers** can measure their progress and maintain control of the implementation and quality assurance processes. The self-audit tool can also be used as the basis for 2 or more providers to hold benchmarking workshops, where problem areas of implementation as well as areas of emerging good practice are shared. This approach to maintaining quality provision moves providers and sectors into more collaborative modes of operation.
- The development of detailed plans to introduce, transform or strengthen quality assurance systems and procedures at all levels and locations in the system over the next five years. ETQAs would need to take the initiative in providing detailed specifications for what they would like to see in these plans, and how they would want to contribute to the funding of budgets.
- The development of dedicated capacity and personnel to drive the implementation of quality assurance systems and processes at all levels and locations in the system. ETQAs would need to indicate what resources and incentives they might be able to offer to accelerate the delivery of targeted training programmes over the next five years.
- The design and moderation of assessment instruments appropriate to RPL assessments against registered standards and qualifications. ETQAs would need to indicate what resources and incentives they might be able to offer to accelerate the realisation of targets for this activity over the next two years.
- The installation of performance management systems and procedures against which all key personnel can be held accountable for the use of resources and the achievement of agreed targets in agreed timeframes. ETQAs would need to indicate what resources and incentives they

might be able to offer to accelerate the realisation of targets for this activity over the next two years.

- The provision by SAQA and the ETQAs of opportunities (seminars, conferences and publications) at which all stakeholders, including candidate learners can profile their work, and contribute to the development of new knowledge in this field.

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APPENDIX A

EXAMPLE OF SELF-AUDIT TOOL

KEY:

Y = criterion is present or developed

N = criterion is not present or developed

U = criterion is present, but is underdeveloped

AREA 1: INSTITUTIONAL POLICY AND ENVIRONMENT

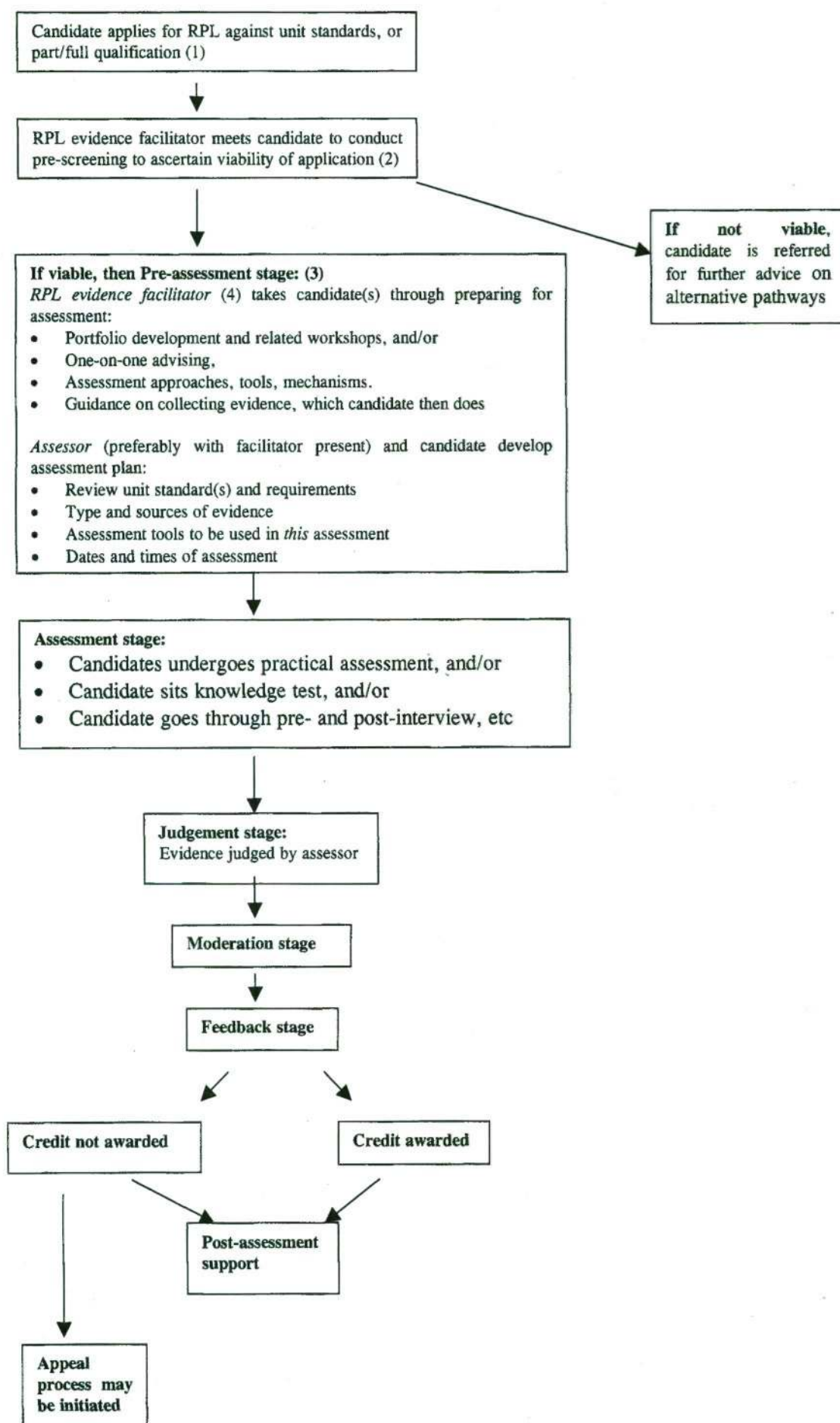
There is a shared commitment on the part of accredited providers, workplaces and ETQAs to provide enabling environments for learning and assessment, inclusive of close cooperation between administration, learning facilitators, advisors, assessors, professional organisations, employers, trade unions and communities.

CRITERIA	LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT			REMEDIAL ACTION	INDICATORS/SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	TASK RESPONSIBILITY	GOAL DATE
	Y	N	U				
Accredited institutions, providers and workplaces have RPL policies and plans that show an explicit commitment to the principles of equity, redress and inclusion.							
Accredited, institutions, providers and workplaces have RPL policy, planning and management structures that operate in accordance with the criteria included in these guidelines and other relevant policy and legislation							
Information about RPL services and programmes is widely available and actively promoted to prospective candidates.							
Admissions procedures and systems are user friendly and inclusive of learners with diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and educational backgrounds and indigenous knowledge.							
Equal access to opportunities for advice, support, time and resources are ensured for all RPL candidates.							

Wherever possible, providers and ETQAs promote regional integration and collaboration among institutions, professional bodies, workplaces in the provision of RPL services and programmes to learners in the region.							
Formal agreements between providers, workplaces and ETQAs ensure effective validation, articulation, and recognition of assessment information and results.							

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF GENERIC RPL PROCESSⁱ



RELATED ASPECTS ASSUMED TO BE IN PLACE

- (1) RPL policies, procedures and systems in place; Information on RPL is readily available
- (2) The provider has developed a criteria framework within which pre-screening takes place; Pre-screening criteria are readily available to candidates.
- (3) Alternate pathways/options as well as additional counselling services
- (4) Where no advisors are available, assessors will undertake all functions

ⁱ This generic process was developed by one of the working groups at the second consultative workshop, and was amended by this document's author.

APPENDIX C

MODELS AND ISSUES FOR PRACTICE

MODELS AND ISSUES FOR PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

As part of the development of these guidelines, a review of international and local RPL projects and practices was undertaken, so that lessons learned from other contexts and in South Africa could be used to inform the development of a forward-thinking RPL policy for South Africa. The approach taken in this description is to briefly outline a few RPL case studies that speak to some of the issues and principles that are being highlighted in this document. It will not seek to provide great detail on how RPL is practiced in each context, nor does it cover all countries internationally that implement RPL.

A HOLISTIC MODEL FOR PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

In Canada we find an example of innovative prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) work with indigenous communities. The First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Ontario is an Aboriginally owned and managed education institution that has developed an 'alternative' set of practices within portfolio development. In this context, the portfolio is used not only as a method of assessment in a narrowly academic sense but also as a way to explore a wide range of individual and collective learning stemming from colonialism and social and cultural oppression. In a context in which both personal healing and cultural renewal are seen as part of the whole educational programme, educators and learners are encouraged to develop a wide range of learning, assessment and therapeutic skills with which to reconstruct their lives, their communities and the whole approach to education and training. According to FNTI, a valid assessment of past learning cannot take place outside this context; when constructing a portfolio of past experiences, individual students inevitably confront the barriers to learning and assessment, both those that arise from its structural and political realities, as well as from the ways in which adult learners have painfully internalised them (Michelson 1997).

INCREASING ADULT LEARNER PARTICIPATION RATES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

It is in the USA that prior learning assessment (PLA) developed approximately 25 years ago. One of the most interesting features of the USA model is its commitment to lifelong learning and to increasing access to learning opportunities for adults in meaningful and cost-effective ways. Thus, since the 1970s, there has been a concerted effort in many institutions in the USA to increase access to HE for adult learners. This has been successful to the degree that, in 1999, 41.1% of all undergraduate students at USA colleges and universities were over the age of 24 (Dumbleton & Strain 1999). Some universities, such as DePaul University in Chicago and New York State University, have colleges dedicated to adult learners (School for New Learning and Empire State College respectively).

It is at the University of the Free State that one of South Africa's earliest RPL pilot projects was started. A 'niche' qualification, targeting working adults in positions of management and leadership, but without having formal qualifications, was started in 1999. Two of the programme's cornerstones are its RPL component (of which portfolio development is a significant part) and its flexible curriculum structure that allows learners to adapt their learning programmes to suit their learning and career needs. The portfolio development course (PDC) is compulsory for all candidates wishing to enter the Bachelor in Management Leadership (BML). For those candidates who have the necessary matriculation exemption, the course is credit-bearing. For those candidates without matric or matriculation exemption, the PDC has been approved by the Matriculation Board as an alternative entry onto the BML, and these candidates make up the extra credits elsewhere in the course. The demand for the course has been extremely high, and the course is now offered off-campus and in other provinces of South Africa.

CREATING AN ENABLING FRAMEWORK FOR RPL THROUGH A NATIONAL RPL CENTRE

In the Netherlands, *Erkennen van elders of informeel Verworven Competenties* (EVC) is being applied in order to contribute to the skills shortage by increasing the flexible 'deployment' of individuals by identifying their current competencies and using educational planning to fast-track appropriate new learning that is individualised. RPL practice in the Netherlands has not yet moved much beyond an experimental phase, and its implementation success is due largely to 'enthusiastic pioneers'. For this reason, the Dutch government set up the Knowledge Centre APL, with funding, at the beginning of 2001 for a period of 4 years. The functions of the Knowledge Centre APL are: the development of expertise and dissemination of information on APL; research and development of best practices; networking; and supporting the new vocational qualifications framework.

MODELS OF REGIONAL RPL PROVISIONING

Two very different types of regional RPL arrangements have been found in North America. The one, representing institutional collaboration, is one of the very few of its kind. The other type of arrangement, a community-based and/or semi-independent RPL centre, is more common.

Vermont State Colleges (VSC)

The VSC is a partnership between 15 community colleges in Vermont, USA. The VSC RPL service is aimed at learners who do not fulfil the conventional college entry requirements, or who have learning from experience for which they wish to gain credit towards a formal college qualification. Most of the learners who do the programme are requesting first or second year college credits. Learners can sign up at any participating institution in Vermont, and the portfolio development course (the main assessment tool) is implemented from a common template. Furthermore, the learner need not necessarily apply for further learning at the institution where s/he is receiving portfolio development assistance.

The programme is co-ordinated from a central office with two staff members who play a co-ordinating and administrative role. The VSC draws its assessors from the participating institutions, and industry where appropriate. Each participating institution has instructors (or advisors) trained in helping learners understand and complete the portfolio, which is then submitted to the central office. Copies of the portfolios are subsequently redistributed to subject-specific **panels** of academic assessors representing the member institutions, as well as to an industry representative where appropriate. The assessors individually assess the portfolios and then come together at the central office to compare notes and consensually agree on and **recommend** a result. The credit(s) is **transferable**, not only across Vermont but also across the US, although it is up to the individual institution, where the RPL candidate may be applying to enter a programme of learning, to accept the RPL credit recommendation(s). The New England Association of Schools and Colleges certifies academically viability and transferability of credits across institutions.

The greatest strength of this model is the participative collaboration of all institutions, from delivering a common PDC, to jointly developing assessment criteria, and awarding of credit through panels of assessors.

PLA Centre, Halifax

The PLA Centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada offers RPL services to individuals *and* organisations that have a range of development needs, from education and training; to those facing unemployment or retrenchment; to career advancement. The PLA Centre is a joint project involving five Halifax universities, the provincial community college system, representatives from community groups, voluntary organisations, labour, the private sector and government.

The Centre has a small staff of 4-5 housed in the ground floor of a shopping mall tower block in central Halifax. While most PLA in Canada focuses helping learners access post-secondary education (PSE) the Halifax Centre process might include PSE access at some point in the learner's development, but this is not its main emphasis. Assessors, advisors and trainers are drawn in from the partner institutions. The Centre offers individuals and groups a range of RPL programmes and services, namely: individual interviews with a PLA advisor, the Transferable Skills Workshop, and a 30-hour portfolio development course.

Some of the strengths of this approach include its practicality for industry and large organisations like the navy, particularly given the rapidly changing nature of the world of work, and the need to re-skill people in the face of retrenchment. Also, RPL plays an important role in steering people away from social assistance and welfare, towards gainful employment and a sense of empowerment over their own life path and choices. Third, the Centre is accessible, in terms of location and structure of services.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

There are examples of RPL-inclusive workforce development projects in the USA, many of which are quite large, eg Ford Motor Company, Qwest, and IBM. However, such projects are not the norm. The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has pioneered a model of workforce development that takes "the employed adult worker as

the focal point, linking the needs and interests of employees, employer demands for skilled and flexible employees, and the capacity of educational providers" (Flynn et al 1994:2). The approach is collaborative and participative, and includes the following components: career and education planning, **assessment of prior learning** motivational workshops, financial assistance for tuition, and a comprehensive information and fund management system through which all data, contracts and reports are processed. In the *Metal and Engineering Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MERSETA)* in South Africa, a model that is moving towards a holistic approach to RPL and related services is emerging. A RPL pilot project has been undertaken in the New Tyre Chamber. This project emerged from an evaluation of an early assessor training course in which components relating to bias and sensitivity, and RPL were inadequate. A new assessor training course, substantially inclusive of these components and aligned with the national unit standards for assessors, has been developed. Workers are provided with time off to attend a one-day 'Returning to Learning' workshop, in addition to one-on-one guidance, in order to assist them in preparing for their assessments. Various components of the project have been concerned with using and adapting similar strategies found in the FNTI model.

In 1997, the *Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)* undertook a participatory RPL research project in the auto and mining sectors. The project is important in highlighting some of the problems that can undermine RPL implementation if not addressed in the planning and consensus-building stages. For example, it emerged that management and workers had different purposes in mind for the RPL activity (management wanted a skills audit, while workers assumed that they would be regarded, receive higher pay and have access to further education and training opportunities). A number of factors contributed to workers being disillusioned with RPL: information relating to RPL procedures and assessment tools was not readily made available; some of the assessment tools used were inappropriate; many workers were given no opportunities to prepare for their assessments and nor did they have access to the standards or criteria against which they were to be assessed; many workers disregarded the outcome of their assessments, as the grading system was not explained, and no verbal feedback was provided. One of the spin-offs was that the RPL exercise mitigated against the development of a notion of lifelong learning. Also, the equity agenda so often assumed inherent in RPL practices did not meet the goal of certifying large numbers of workers.

The findings from the research were used to develop an RPL policy for COSATU affiliates that sets out eight implementation, including developing a union mandate, establishing a Joint Committee, agreeing on the purpose(s) of RPL, putting in place support structures for workers, etc, in order to create a worker-supportive and participatory RPL framework for workplaces (COSATU 2000).

SOME OVERALL COMMENTS AND ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE CASE STUDIES

The discussion above highlighted a number of diverse approaches to providing RPL services and programmes, all of which reflect innovative responses to particular contexts,

issues and stakeholders. However, in reviewing these case studies for the purpose of learning lessons for a broad-based implementation of RPL in South Africa, a number of important contextual issues and/or differences need to be highlighted.

Firstly, a number of case studies are from First World countries that are not faced with the same issues relating to levels of illiteracy, participation of citizens in formal education, or unemployment rates as occur in South Africa. Secondly, RPL in those contexts often takes place in a situation where one of the concerns relating to groups such as immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, is on assimilation into the culture, language and economy of the receiving country. Issues relating to the transformation of society to reflect the developmental needs of the majority is generally not part of the discourse or practice of RPL in the First World contexts examined. Thirdly, although much of the literature examined indicated that financial resources for RPL in these countries is insufficient, the resources that are available for RPL implementation is quite considerable, such as in the Netherlands. Fourthly, the issue of language, as in South Africa where the majority of people do not speak English, is less of an issue in these other contexts. Finally, the experience of the COSATU research, with regard to the social redress and equity agenda of RPL being undermined unless carefully designed, is an issue that has been foregrounded by the FNTI experience. It is evident that all stakeholders involved in RPL implementation and quality assurance will need to ensure that their processes are inclusive, participatory and stakeholder-driven.

On the other hand, these case studies point to the fact that it is possible to provide RPL services more cost-effectively in a context of scarcer resources. The two regional models represent the basis on which more cost-effective options for South Africa can be explored. Secondly, the UFS case study indicates that where institutional will exists, non-traditional groups of learners can be accommodated within institutions in meaningful ways. The MERSETA case study demonstrates the possibilities for developing a holistic model within an economic sector.

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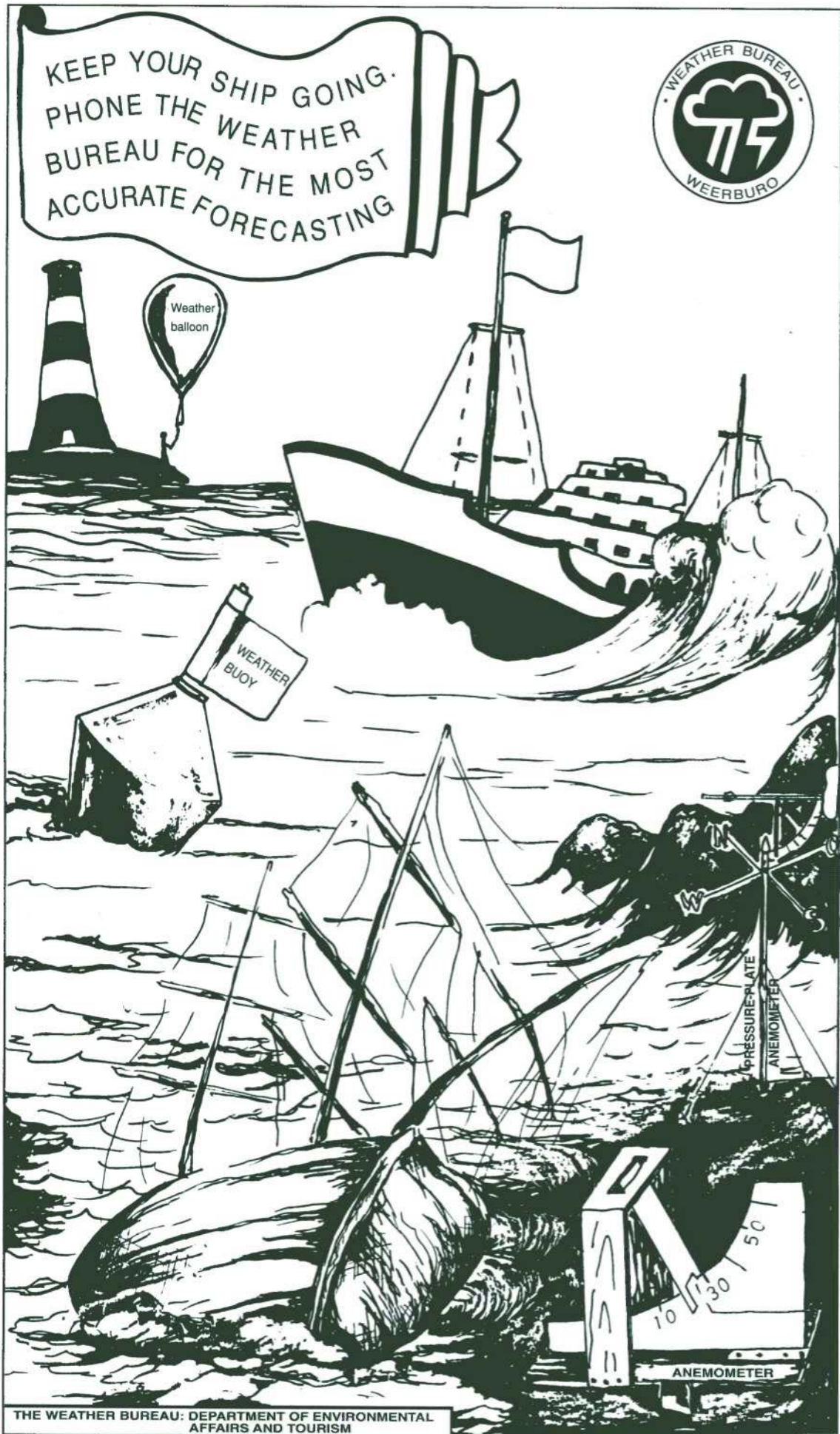
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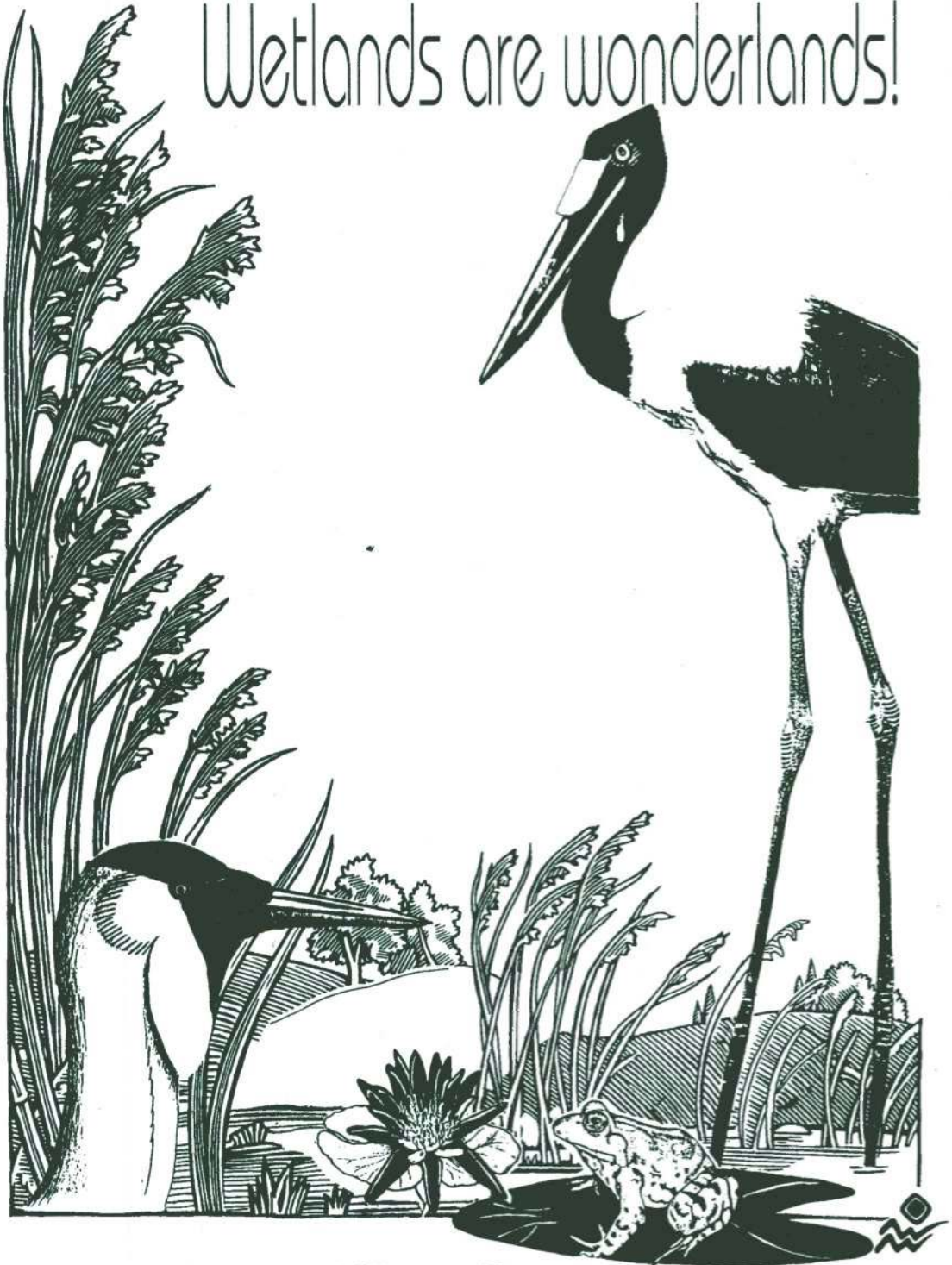
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