

Good practice in validation of learning outcomes

South Africa

Qualification: Plant Production



Good practise in validation of learning outcomes. Republic of South Africa. Qualification "Plant Production"

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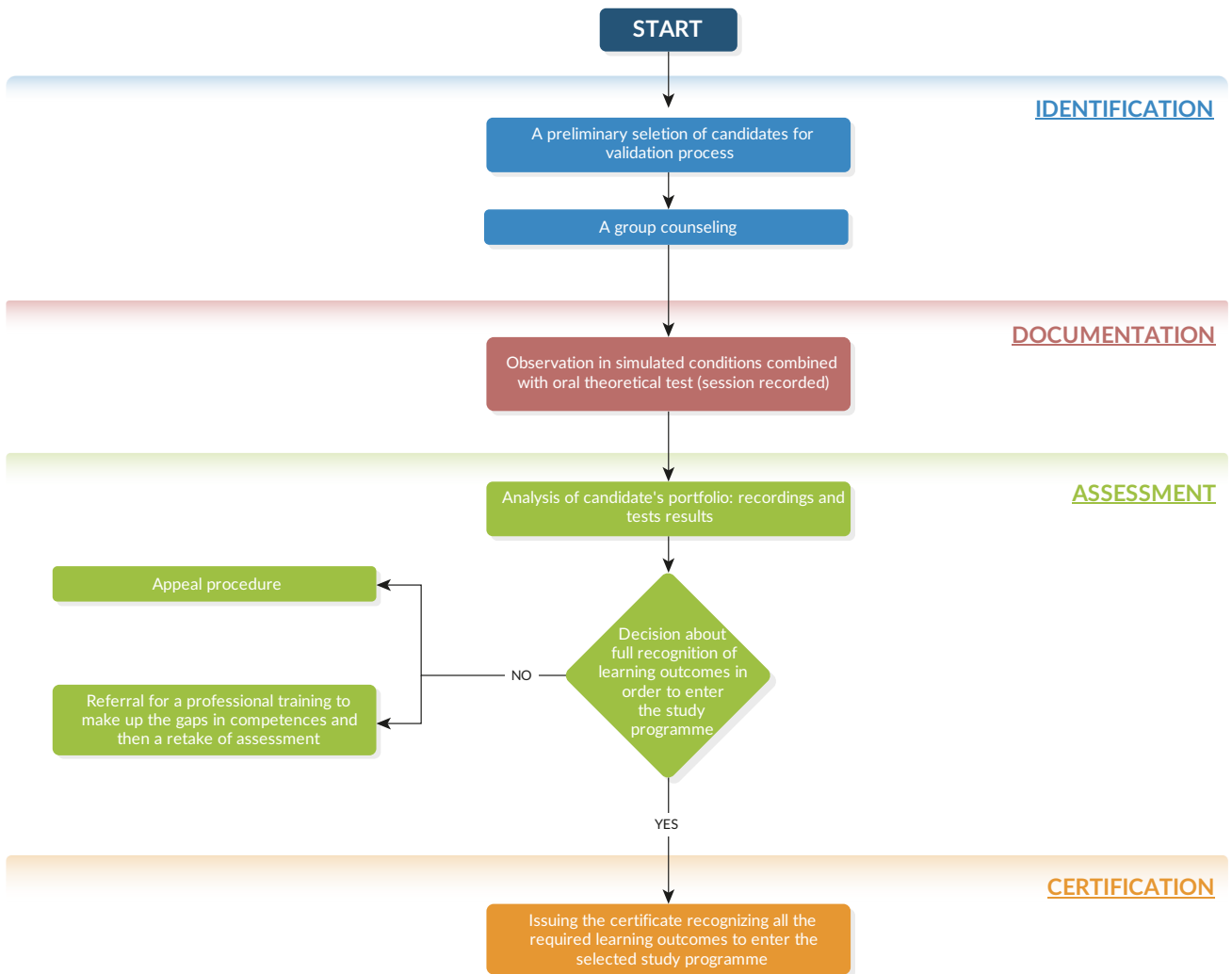
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1. Country, institution name

- South Africa
- Chartall Business College

2. Institution website

<https://chartallcampus.com>

3. Qualifications

Comment

Plant Production, South African NQF level 1

4. Short description of the validation process

Comment

The good practice from South Africa presents the pilot process to confirm the competences acquired by those working on farms. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process described here was a first for this qualification and the sector. It was preceded by research, needs assessment and training for practitioners. The pilot nature of the good practice allows us to look at the process of designing RPL and the actions taken to best adapt it to the needs of the candidates.

One of the issues emphasised in adapting this RPL procedure was the language used during the process. There are 11 official languages in the RSA, but RPL is usually performed in English. This is the language also used in classes at most public and private schools. However, only 8.4% of RSA residents indicate English as their first language. The pre-selection process for people interested in participating in RPL already showed that these are people who cannot read or write in English. It was therefore decided that the pilot will be done in the local languages of the candidates.

Another atypical solution in the pilot was the selection of methods and tools used. Initially it was assumed that assessment would take place using a written theoretical test, which is quite common. However, this concept was changed as the result of the diagnosis conducted before implementing the pilot. It was found that candidates had difficulty in answering questions on knowledge in isolation from practice. It was therefore decided that the candidates would be observed while performing practical tasks. Questions about knowledge were asked orally. They were also answered orally and, when the situation required, candidates could also answer the questions in pictorial form, for example by matching pictures with definitions. A new version of the portfolio was also developed and participants could take advantage of counselling. This gave them the opportunity to become familiar with the process itself or with specialised terminology.

This good practice from the RSA is an example of an RPL process that has been significantly adapted to the needs of candidates and has thus become a tool for promoting equal opportunities.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

Comment

The RSA has a large number of people working in the agricultural sector with extensive practical experience, but with a low level of basic skills. It is believed that employees in this sector often have rare specialised skills acquired through many years of work in the profession, but they are not formally confirmed. The opportunity to undergo RPL aims to support persons working in the agricultural sector.

The RPL pilot for the qualification "Plant production" was aimed at helping farmers to obtain a full qualification or its part. It also aimed to build the capacity of staff to validate learning outcomes in one of the vocational Agricultural Colleges. The official confirmation of competences enables people to gain access to

education, apply for successive qualifications, and also to obtain subsidies, which are provided only to qualified farmers.

As already mentioned, one of the objectives of the project was to build up the capacity of staff to perform RPL after the pilot. For this reason, among others, the pilot was implemented together with Chartall Business College and a vocational Agricultural College. The quality of the process was supervised by the Agricultural Sector Education & Training Authority (AGRISETA). AGRISETA also confirmed the results of the assessment and issued the certificates confirming the attainment of the qualification.

Chartall Business College is a private education and training institution that has also been conducting RPL since 2013. The College is accredited by various Sector Education & Training Authorities (SETAs). It also manages training or RPL projects funded by employers or SETA.

The Agricultural College provides education and training services for the sector. However, it did not have the formal capacity to organise RPL. As part of the pilot project, RPL was performed by newly trained assessors from the Agricultural College, under the supervision of experienced practitioners from Chartall Business College. AGRISETA is the Office for Education and Training for the Agricultural Sector, which manages education and training in this sector. It develops and promotes social and economic development opportunities and promotes employment for agricultural enterprises through accessible education, training and development in agriculture. The Office is responsible for developing the skills of agricultural workers – employed and unemployed – and for the accreditation of training and institutions conducting RPL such as Chartall Business College. It is also responsible for monitoring and the quality assurance of activities in accredited institutions.

The pilot project consisted of two parts:

1. Preparation of the College, capacity building and process design, consisting of:

- reviewing practices in the sector and selecting the target groups who could benefit from RPL;
- recruiting candidates for RPL and the diagnosis of their needs as well as the possible difficulties in participating in the process;
- adapting RPL methods and tools to the needs of candidates;
- training Agricultural College staff in RPL activities.

2. Performing the validation of learning outcomes, consisting of:

- the initial recruitment of RPL candidates;
- counselling, which took place in groups under the guidance of counsellors, aimed at familiarising candidates with the vocabulary used in formal education and learning outcomes;
- further tailoring the tools used in RPL to the needs of the candidates;
- assessment of the learning outcomes, divided into two parts:
 - in the first part, candidates performed specific tasks demonstrating their knowledge and skills while being observed by assessors; all the tasks performed and answers given were video recorded,
 - in the second part, the evidence (recordings, observation sheets and oral response sheets) from the first phase was assessed for equivalency with the qualification (analysis of evidence and statements);
- certification;
- performing activities to evaluate the process.

5.1. Preparing the institution and review of practices and needs

Before initiating activities to organise and perform RPL, solutions on the recognition of competences in the agricultural sector were analysed. It was found that services offering the recognition of learning outcomes were not available in the sector. The main groups of potential recipients of the service were also identified:

- small agricultural cooperatives and the farmers working there;
- farm workers;

- farm workers on farms managed by Agricultural Colleges.

The preparatory work also included a preliminary assessment of the readiness of potential candidates to participate in RPL. The aim of this activity was to identify the abilities and needs of those who could undertake the process. This was to ensure that the way RPL is performed and the methods and tools used were tailored to the candidates. Interviews were held with representatives of the three target groups referred to above. During these activities, information was collected on:

- the profile of potential candidates and their professional experience;
- socio-economic status and access to resources that could be used during RPL (e.g. digital tools to present or make available evidence of possessing learning outcomes);
- the level of formal education to determine the level of basic competences such as reading and writing;
- learning strategies and personal competences that could influence the course of RPL positively (e.g. when the candidate is aware of his/her competences, believes in him/herself, is motivated to act) or negatively (e.g. when the candidate has low self-esteem, has difficulties with self-reflection).

The identification of the abilities and barriers among the candidates resulted in much information, which allowed the pilot project to be well prepared. It turned out, among other things, that it was very difficult for the candidates to complete a questionnaire in English or to collect written information. The people selected to participate in the project found it difficult to read, write or speak in English. These observations and the results of the initial diagnosis were taken into account in developing the RPL process, methods and tools. It was decided to perform RPL in local languages, not in English, and to change the methods, techniques and tools used in the process from written to oral.

The results of the needs assessment of the candidates confirmed the premise that adjusting the process to their needs is required to achieve the anticipated goals. However, this posed a challenge to assessors, who usually used written tests in the process. The adjustments needed for RPL required them to prepare and train for a new way of working.

5.2. Initial recruitment of candidates

After concluding all the activities to prepare for RPL, the recruitment of participants in the pilot was initiated. Those willing to participate in the process were invited to submit recruitment applications. Sessions were held on "What is the recognition of learning outcomes and how will it benefit you?" Many persons were interested, but due to limited funding for the pilot, only 30 people were selected at this stage.

Once chosen, structured interviews were conducted with the candidates to determine their readiness to participate in the process. Questions were asked about:

- education – to meet the formal qualification requirements as much as possible;
- literacy – to determine the form of assessment (written vs. oral);
- the preferred language in which RPL was to be conducted;
- professional experience,
- the ability to identify their own learning outcomes.

On the basis of the responses, an individual report was prepared for each candidate, which identified their needs and readiness to join the process. At this stage, some candidates resigned from participating in the pilot, leaving a total of 20 participants.

5.3. Counselling

In the RSA, guidance plays an important role in the process of validating learning outcomes. Individuals who acquire competences through their professional work often do not know professional, academic terminology. However, this knowledge is needed to obtain qualifications. This is what prompted those designing the pilot for RPL of the "Plant production" qualification to plan a guidance process to help overcome this barrier.

Several groups (5-6 people) participated in the counselling process, which lasted about 3 days. During this time, counsellors (a counsellor from the Agricultural College and a mentor from Chartall Business College) supported the candidates in organising their competences and naming them using specialised terminology. This allowed the candidates to identify their competences and realise how much they actually know and can do. It also gave them confidence. The guidance also provided a better understanding of the RPL activities and was an educational experience in itself. At the end of the guidance stage, candidates were formally prepared to participate in RPL and the next steps were agreed upon together.

5.5. Assessment

As already mentioned, this good practice relates to a pilot project. The way it was implemented was largely tailored to the needs of the candidates, making the process atypical.

Initially, it was assumed that candidates' theoretical knowledge would be tested in written form, but as a result of the needs assessment conducted earlier (described above), this was changed. Given that it was difficult for the candidates to talk about the knowledge related to performing particular activities in isolation from practice, they were able to tell the story of what they were doing while demonstrating practical tasks. They acquired their competences to a large extent while working, so the knowledge they had was integrated with their practical skills. When they were allowed to simultaneously act and describe what they were doing, they had no problem in identifying the knowledge they had. As a result, the tool for assessing these learning outcomes was adapted to the needs of the candidates and changed in such a way that questions about knowledge could be integrated into demonstrating practical tasks.

Observation in simulated conditions and collecting evidence of acquired learning outcomes

The assessment of learning outcomes began on a farm, where 21 assessment stations were established. Candidates performed various practical tasks at each of them. The individual stations had to be far enough away from each other to enable the tasks to be performed independently by the candidates. Upon arrival at each station, the candidates performed the assigned tasks and answered questions.

Each candidate was accompanied by a newly trained assessor from the Agricultural College, who kept an eye on the time, asked questions and took notes on observation sheets. At this stage, the assessor's task was not to assess the candidate but to support him/her in gathering as much evidence as possible of the required competences. The questions on the observation sheet were described in English, the assessor translated them into the candidate's language. In case the candidate had a problem with understanding the terms, the assessor reformulated them so that they could be better understood. All oral answers and demonstrated activities were video recorded for later assessment. Each "candidate – assessor" pair was accompanied by a person who filmed the whole process.

Considering the number of examination stations and the whole process, assessing the learning outcomes took a long time. The shortest lasted 2 days and the longest 5 days.

Portfolio assessment

The portfolio was assessed by the assessors after the observations of the candidates had concluded and the evidence was gathered. The assessments were performed based on the video recordings, task results, observation sheets and oral test responses. Assessing the evidence was a complex process and the findings from the analysis were compared with the results of a standards matrix and assessment criteria.

In the case of insufficient evidence, the assessors made notes indicating the gaps. Candidates were given the opportunity to return to their assessment stations to collect the missing evidence.

5.5. Certification

The candidates who completed the RPL process successfully through this pilot were certified. This information was later sent to the National Learner Record Database (NLRD).

In the RSA, all qualifications have equal status regardless of how they are attained. No certificate can therefore indicate that the qualification was attained through RPL, and such information is transferred to the database for statistical purposes only.

5.6. Activities undertaken after concluding validation

Because the process was a pilot, it was important to collect feedback and draw conclusions. To this end, focus group interviews were held with the candidates and practitioners from the Agricultural College, as well as with the assessors and trainers from Chartall Business College.

Feedback from the candidates:	Feedback from the persons performing RPL:
participation in RPL was instructive	participation in the project was instructive, broadened knowledge and improved the ability to test practical skills
the possibility of using guidance was assessed positively – the candidates indicated that without the support of counsellors they would have been assessed as not ready for the process and not competent enough	the language in which the RPL was performed proved to be a challenge; although the assessors spoke the candidates' languages, they stressed that it was difficult to conduct the process
participation in the process increased self-esteem and self-confidence – the candidates indicated that RPL helped them to see their value and to see that they knew more than they thought (e.g. one of the candidates said he wanted to wear his certificate around his neck so that others could see what he had achieved, that he was qualified)	the presence of the assessor from Chartall Business College was a great support
it was emphasised that participation in RPL and the confirmation of competences increases opportunities in the education and professional market	the persons performing RPL assessed that they were very well prepared for their role and tasks

Table 1. Examples of feedback from the participants in the process.

6. Validation methods

Typical methods used for RPL in the RSA are the assessment of a candidate's portfolio, which can be supplemented by a written theoretical test (when the evidence gathered is not sufficient to confirm the possession of learning outcomes). In the pilot process described herein, portfolio assessment was also used, but the way the evidence was collected was atypical, as was the combination of methods.

During the pilot, candidates did not gather evidence of knowledge, skills and professional experience by themselves. They performed practical tasks which were recorded and then analysed by the assessor. The candidate's oral responses were also recorded and treated as evidence of having the required learning outcomes.

As already mentioned in section 5, an initial diagnosis was made of potential candidates. This allowed assessors to determine their capabilities, so that those designing RPL could be well prepared to perform it. The experts leading the project adapted the methods and tools to enable the candidates to participate in the process and to remove barriers (although this did not happen in all cases, as is discussed in section 7 on validation results).

The changes made to adapt the methods and tools to the candidates included:

- the collection of evidence for the portfolio by the assessors and not the candidate (it was assumed that candidates would have difficulty in preparing the portfolio on their own);
- the theoretical test was changed from a written form to an oral one.

The questions were read out to the candidates in the language of their choice and they had to answer the questions either orally or using a form by selecting the appropriate answer from among those presented graphically – stickers with pictures and words in different languages (English, Zulu, South Sotho and Afrikaans). The questions concerned processes typical for plant production (e.g. the germination cycle of fruit or the process of metamorphosis).

Below is a sample of a tool used in RPL.

Assignment 1. For each type of fruit:

- Select an example
- Select the right definition

<p>Examples: (fruits are depicted on the form – stickers and their names in various languages)</p>	<p>Strawberry Istrobheri Menokotshwai Aarbei</p>	<p>Pineapple Uphayinaphu Peinapole Pynappel</p>	<p>Tomato Utamatisi Tamati Tamatie</p>
<p>Definitions:</p>	<p>Multiple flowers with ovaries (eggs) joined together.</p>	<p>Single compound flower. It contains many ovaries (eggs).</p>	<p>One single ovary (egg). May contain one or more seeds. May be fleshy or dry.</p>

Assessment criteria (standard)	Fruit type	Example	Definition
SO1 (AC7) SO3 (AC5)	Simple fruit		
	Multiple fruits		
	Aggregate fruit		

7. Validation results

Comment

The RPL in the described pilot was intended to allow the candidates to attain the “Plant production” qualification. The pilot project involved 20 persons, of whom:

- 9 confirmed all the learning outcomes and were awarded the qualification;
- 5 confirmed part of the learning outcomes. After completing the process, they received guidance on the next steps, including training planned for them to support their achievement of the level of literacy required for the qualification;
- 6 had their learning outcomes assessed three times (RSA's repetition limit), but their efforts were not successful. They were sent to Agricultural Colleges for training, after which they could be assessed again. Each of these persons received individual support – detailed feedback and assistance in developing a follow-up plan.

8. Human resources

Based on the conclusions of the pilot project, the requirements were identified for those involved in RPL in the agricultural sector. In accordance with these guidelines, assessors should:

- be experts in the field of the qualification;
- have expertise in the area of farm operations;
- have completed a one-week training course in RPL;
- have experience in using validation tools (testing).

In addition, assessors in the RSA must be registered as professional assessors and should have experience in at least one area of RPL among the following:

- developing RPL solutions,
- designing and developing tools,
- counselling,
- assessment,
- quality assurance,
- organising activities or administration,
- monitoring and evaluation, research and development.

The RPL during the pilot for the “Plant production” qualification was performed by employees of an Agriculture College, who participated in training to prepare them for the assessment.

They were supported by experienced assessors and trainers from Chartall Business College. The lead assessor and trainer at Chartall Business College has a doctoral degree in implementing the recognition of learning outcomes and 15 years of practical experience in conducting RPL. The other trainers at Chartall Business College had practical experience and relevant sectoral qualifications.

Training of RPL practitioners

Training was organised to prepare the persons for performing RPL in this pilot. Most of the trainees were registered assessors (which was one of the requirements for participation in the process), but they were not familiar with the form of RPL used in the pilot process. Previously they had only assessed written exams (conducted in English).

The training lasted five days and included a summary of issues relating to formal assessment and the basis of validating learning outcomes, including presentations of methods and tools used in RPL and exercises to practice them. The participants initially felt that the training was too long, but after a while, it was assessed as having prepared them very well for the role and tasks to be performed.

9. Quality assurance

Comment

The quality assurance of the RPL in the pilot project took place at two levels:

- internal, conducted by the institution performing RPL and, in this case, by the RPL practitioners from the Agricultural College supported by mentors from Chartall Business College;
- external, led by the supervisory body for the quality assurance of qualifications in the sector, in this case AGRISETA.

Among other reasons, because of the length of the RPL process and its innovative character, internal evaluation was conducted in parallel with RPL. External evaluators accompanied the assessors during the RPL process and later watched the recorded videos. After the materials were analysed, an internal evaluation report was prepared and sent to AGRISETA with the results of RPL.

External quality assurance was conducted by AGRISETA and based on the results of the internal evaluation as well as a sample of the assessments performed by the assessors from the Agricultural College. The external evaluator also reviewed the assessment plans and internal evaluation plans and reports.

10. Financing

In this case, no RPL costs were incurred by the candidates. The Agricultural College where RPL took place is financed by the state and all necessary materials and tools to confirm candidates' competences were available on site.

In the RSA, employers in a given sector pay a fee to SETA. These funds are used to organise training and traineeships and to finance RPL. It is possible for individuals to finance RPL at their own expense, but this is not common.

11. Context of good practice

The first references to the recognition of learning outcomes in the RSA can be found in the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of 1995. The Act contains information on the National Qualifications Framework, the issue of improving the quality of education and training, easier access to education, as well as supporting the development of citizens and equal opportunities in education. Specific guidelines and regulations on RPL were published in 1998. They specify, among others, that all qualifications can be attained in their entirety or in part through RPL.

RPL in South Africa is closely linked to social justice activities. Many people view RPL as a way to increase access to qualifications or employment and thus the opportunity to change one's life. RPL also provides equal opportunities to those who were denied the right to education or development during apartheid. However, despite the high hopes associated with the RPL system, the implementation of the solutions which they provide has not been widespread. Many attempts have been made to implement RPL in the South African system, including through the organisation of various pilot projects – an example of which is the description of this good practice.

Comments

South African NQF level 1

South African NQF level 1

NQF level 1 is the lowest qualifications level in South Africa. This level is equivalent to completing 9th grade in formal education (South African NQF level 4 is the level of completing the last year of school, which has 12 grades).

The good practice from South Africa presents the pilot process

The good practice from South Africa presents the pilot process

RPL in the RSA enables the confirmation of learning outcomes achieved in different circumstances without the need to attend training. The process can result in a full qualification or the recognition of part of it. It does not depend on the way or form of acquiring competences, it is the results that count – the learning outcomes. This example of RPL shows how learning outcomes acquired through farm work can be validated. The definition of RPL has changed over the years. At first, it was defined as a process of assessing a candidate by matching acquired competences with the requirements of the qualification. The result of such RPL was always to obtain a full qualification or its part. The definition was changed in 2013, when it was considered that the process should include not only the assessment of competences, but also counselling in this area.

SETAs

SETAs

SETAs were established and registered in March 2000 in accordance with the Skills Development Act of 1998. There are 21 SETAs, with each responsible for education management, curriculum development, internships, skills development programmes and RPL for the given sector.

The RPL in the described pilot was intended to allow the candidates to attain the “Plant production” qualification

The RPL in the described pilot was intended to allow the candidates to attain the “Plant producti...

RPL in South Africa may have three aims: First, obtaining part of or the entire qualification. The RSA has a credit accumulation and transfer system; those who demonstrated possession of the relevant learning outcomes achieve credits (points). Individual qualifications differ in their volume and therefore different amounts of credit must be obtained in order to attain them. RPL is mainly applied for attaining vocational education qualifications. The quality assurance of the process in this case is provided by SETA; Second, gaining admission to a study programme; Third, obtaining a “professional designation”, which is not a qualification but which confirms a professional position and refers to registration with a professional body. In accordance with the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), all professional organisations granting professional designation must offer the possibility of attaining them through RPL.

The quality assurance of the RPL

The quality assurance of the RPL

AGRISETA is responsible for the quality of the RPL process and professional qualifications, including the “Plant production” qualification. The standards for quality assurance, evaluation and assessment of candidates' competences are in accordance with the guidelines of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act.