



Policy

Recognition of Prior Learning

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ACRONYMS

DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQsF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer

1. INTRODUCTION

The Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA) accepts Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an integral part of the higher education academic project and as an initiative to support transformation of the education and training system in South Africa. It is acknowledged that all learning has value and MANCOSA accepts the challenge to assess prior learning for access and award credit where deemed valid as part of MANCOSA's commitment through its academic endeavours to promote lifelong learning. The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (November 2013) highlights the importance of providing access through RPL (Section 9.2.2.4). This intent and commitment is captured in the MANCOSA vision and mission.

2. AIM

MANCOSA's aim with respect to RPL is to

- Establish guidelines, principles and criteria for the implementation of an organisational RPL strategy.
- Provide ways of accommodating prior learning appropriately within the framework of admissions and academic credits.
- Contribute to its mission 'to redress the disadvantages, inequities and imbalances of the past', and to 'promote access to learning that will expand educational and employment opportunities for the historically disadvantaged, and support social transformation and redress.'
- Implement the Student Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy by making provision for RPL as an alternative access route for candidates who do not meet the general minimum admission requirements for admission to MANCOSA's academic programmes.

3. DEFINITION

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

"Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)" means the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and/or skills of a person are made visible and are assessed for the purposes of certification, alternative access and admission, and further learning and development.

As a principle, it endorses the value of giving recognition to knowledge and skills that have been acquired outside a formal learning programme.

As a process, it consists of a range of educational and training activities and services through which the principle of RPL is applied and students are supported in different contexts as they go through the RPL process.

These activities and services include the provision of RPL-related information; advising, coaching, and administration services; alternative access programmes; integrated curriculum design; and a variety of formative and summative assessment practices. (Cf. SAQA Regulation No 802, October 2012:8)

4. PURPOSE

MANCOSA understands that RPL is invaluable to ensure that applicants who possess skills acquired through life or work experience and non-formal education are granted admission to study. The purpose of this policy focuses on ensuring that a person gains recognition for proven competence. The RPL assessment focuses on flexible ways of evaluating a person's lifelong experience (formal and informal) against a set of pre-determined criteria.

RPL takes account of the criteria

- formal study / education and training programmes;
- work experience (in house and on the job training);
- self-study;
- on the job work experience;

- studies that were undertaken for the purpose of personal gain/interest;
- company-based training;
- industry-based training;
- working with experts in the field;
- internships, and life experience.

Credit is granted for RPL when, in the assessment done by the Student Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Committee, the candidate's knowledge and skills correspond to the learning outcomes of the module for which credit is applied. It is important to remember that the Committee will focus on the quality and not the quantity of prior learning and/or experience.

Note: Applications for credit are made for specific modules and programmes.

The RPL process focuses on establishing whether the student has acquired competence in the following areas:

- Basic theoretical knowledge;
- Practical competence;
- Reflective competence; and
- Applied competence.

The RPL process for students has the following implications:

- The student only enrolls for those aspects of the programme/ module that are still required after the application of RPL credits;
- A reduction in the cost of the programme;
- Accelerated attainment of qualifications through higher standing and specific credits granted.

RPL may serve the following purposes within MANCOSA:

- To allow mature-age learners (applicants who are at least 23 years old) without a Senior Certificate and/or matriculation exemption, access to primary degree studies by accrediting learning obtained through experience. In this way, RPL may function as an *approved alternative access route into degree studies*.
- To allow students without a (relevant) primary degree access to postgraduate qualifications;
- To recognise prior learning by the award of credits for modules, for non-degree purposes or towards a qualification, up to a maximum of 50% of the qualification.

RPL addresses two important issues that of access and redress:

- RPL facilitates access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths.
- RPL is designed to accelerate the redress of historical discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

However, the following provisos should be noted:

1. In terms of CHE accreditation criteria, a maximum of 10% of students registered for any qualification may enter via RPL.¹ Only in exceptional circumstances, and only in undergraduate programmes, will admission of students through an RPL route be allowed to exceed 10% of the total number of students in the programme-see the HEQC criteria.
2. If a candidate is accepted for the RPL process, *study places* for the envisaged qualification must be available (though there may be some competition for places).

¹ Higher Education Quality Committee: *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*, 3.1.2: Student recruitment, admission and selection, Criterion 2 (iii): "Admission of students through an RPL route should not constitute more than 10 percent of the student intake for the programme."

In allowing students to commit themselves to a degree study through RPL, MANCOSA commits to reasonably provide an enabling learning environment for such non-traditional students, and to ensure that policies, structures, resources and curricula accommodate RPL students.

5. SCOPE

The RPL policy of MANCOSA covers all forms of RPL with regard to:

- process and principles, and
- related aspects such as assessment and admission as covered in the respective MANCOSA policies.

6. STANDARDS

The following quality assurance mechanisms are in line with international good practice (CAEL, 1995):

6.1 Academic standards

- 6.1.1 Credit is awarded for competence (demonstrated learning) only, not for experience.
- 6.1.2 Competence refers to the ability to act in ways that reflect internalised knowledge, skills and attitudes (also known as graduate characteristics) which are best described in terms of four kinds of competence, viz.: foundational, practical, reflexive and applied competence.
 - (a) The term 'foundational competence' is used to refer to demonstration of the kind of (theoretical) knowledge and understanding that underpins action;
 - (b) The term 'practical competence' is used to refer to the demonstrated ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action, make considered decisions about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action;
 - (c) The term 'reflexive competence' is used to refer to a student's ability to integrate or connect performances and decision making with understanding, to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances, and to explain the reasons behind these adaptations;
 - (d) The term 'applied competence' is an overarching (umbrella) term for the three kinds of competence discussed immediately above (Government Gazette No 20844, February 2000:10).
- 6.1.3 Credit is awarded only for learning that is aligned to the learning outcomes of MANCOSA's programmes.
- 6.1.4 Credit is awarded only for learning that has a balance between theory and practical application, appropriate to the module or programme,
- 6.1.5 Credit is awarded only for learning that has the required breadth and depth of the module to the minimum level of competence.
- 6.1.6 Appropriate subject matter and academic experts with assessment experience determines competence levels and credit awards.
- 6.1.7 Credits must be appropriate to the MANCOSA programme in which they are accepted, and make a clear link between the career path and the learning outcomes of a particular programme at MANCOSA.

6.2 Administrative Standards

In accordance with MANCOSA's Academic Regulations, the following administrative standards apply:

- 6.2.1 Selection and/or assessment panels ensure that credits are not given twice for the same learning.

- 6.2.2 Policies and procedures applied to assessment, including provision for appeal, are fully disclosed and prominently available.
- 6.2.3 Policy and assessment practices are regularly monitored, reviewed, evaluated and revised.
- 6.2.4 All academic and administrative personnel are trained in the process, principles and procedures for RPL.
- 6.2.5 Records are kept according to MANCOSA's policy.

6.3 RPL Criteria (Postgraduate and MBA)

It is possible in exceptional circumstances to gain entry into a programme on the basis of RPL. A small number of applicants who do not meet the minimum entry requirements will be considered for acceptance via RPL.

The applicant must:

- Be at least 30 years of age.
- Have a minimum of 10 years work experience.
- Submit a Portfolio of Evidence (CV; transcripts and certificates; personal letter of motivation; letter of recommendation from employer; employer report detailing technical and soft skills; current job profile; detailed list of qualifications and work experience).
- Undertake a cognitive ability assessment.
- Be available for a personal or telephonic interview on a date specified by MANCOSA.

All RPL applications are subject to evaluation by the Student Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Committee.

6.4 RPL Criteria (Undergraduate)

It is possible in exceptional circumstances to gain entry into a programme on the basis of RPL. A small number of applicants who do not meet the minimum entry requirements will be considered for acceptance via RPL.

The applicant must:

- Be at least 23 years of age.
- Have a minimum of 3 years work experience.
- Submit a Portfolio of Evidence (CV; transcripts and certificates; personal letter of motivation; letter of recommendation from employer; detailed list of qualifications and work experience).
- Be available for a personal or telephonic interview on a date specified by MANCOSA.
- Undertake an English language proficiency test at the discretion of the Student Admission and Selection Committee.

All RPL applications are subject to evaluation by the Student Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Committee.

7. PRINCIPLES

The following principles are applicable to RPL practice at MANCOSA:

7.1 General Principles

- 7.1.1 All Programme prerequisites are applicable.
- 7.1.2 Admission requirements of MANCOSA are applicable.

- 7.1.3 Applicants are exposed to a formal RPL process, which includes selection and assessment.
- 7.1.4 All applicants who want to change field at postgraduate level, and who do not comply with regular admission requirements, are selected and assessed through the RPL process.
- 7.1.5 The business rule of 50% of a programme to be completed at MANCOSA is applicable.
- 7.1.6 If a student does not acquire the credits required to obtain the qualification within five years of receiving the RPL credits, such credits are forfeited (with the exception of specific subjects or modules, e.g. legislation that has changed) for reasons of academic currency.
- 7.1.7 The time-line between selection and assessment should not be longer than one year module or programme matching, or as negotiated between assessor and applicant.
- 7.1.8 The time-line between selection and assessment should not be longer than eighteen months for assessment for degree status.
- 7.1.9 When found to be competent, the applicant may gain access to a MANCOSA programme and/or be exempted from the applicable module in accordance with MANCOSA's Academic Rules and Regulations.
- 7.1.10 Support to applicants is made available throughout the RPL process.

7.2 RPL Assessment

The Assessment Policy for MANCOSA is applicable.

7.2.1 Module-Match Assessment

- (a) RPL is conducted mainly on a module-match basis. This is where an applicant qualifies for RPL for certain modules in a programme. This applies to all qualification levels.
- (b) Assessment is conducted by matching prior learning with the learning outcomes of individual modules.
- (c) Assessment mechanisms may be supplemented by means of an interview.

7.2.2 Methods of Assessment for RPL

The following criteria pertain:

- (a) The choice of method will depend on the learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria against which competence will be assessed;
- (b) The method should be appropriate and accessible to the assessor as well as the candidate with specific accommodations made for students with learning difficulties, barriers and disabilities;
- (c) Applicable assessment methods for RPL include:
 - Challenge summative assessment opportunities, which may be a written oral examination or performance assessment;
 - Standardised assessments;
 - An RPL portfolio, which includes assignments that address specific learning outcomes or products.

7.2.3 Evidence

The presentation of evidence should be in accordance with the criteria set in MANCOSA's assessment policy. All evidence, but mainly primary sources and direct evidence, will be accepted. The following criteria will be specifically applicable to RPL assessment:

- Authenticity;
- Currency;
- Sufficiency.

7.3 Awarding of Credits

The following standard applies:

Credits are awarded for individual modules or qualification status, if, in the opinion of the assessors, the applicant has satisfied at least 50% of the outcomes or meets all or most of the outcomes to determine the suitability of being admitted into the programme.

7.4 Appeals Procedure

If the applicant is not satisfied with the selection or assessment and awarding of credit, s/he can appeal the decision. The general appeals procedure is applicable.

8. RPL PROCESS

Accrediting learning obtained through experience (for either access or credit) requires the following procedures, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels:

- Preliminary information and advice (which may be a recommendation not to proceed with RPL).
- Preparation of an application (with the assistance of a student counsellor and RPL specialist) to demonstrate appropriate competence in terms of *outcomes*.
- Evidence may take the form of modules or qualifications completed at another institution, a challenge examination or assignment, a portfolio, etc.
- A portfolio provides documentary evidence in support of the specific RPL application. Some documentation (e.g. academic transcripts or motivations) may be specified as a requirement for entrance to specific qualifications. The candidate may include any further documentation (in written, visual or oral form, as appropriate for the discipline involved) in support of the application. In addition, an interview may be required.

Final assessment and accreditation procedure:

- Recording of RPL results;
- Appeals;
- Post-assessment guidance.

9. ROLE PLAYERS

The RPL process is managed by the following:

9.1 Senate

Senate approves all admission and selection requirements as it approves all other academic policies.

9.2 Student Admission and Selection Committee

MANCOSA's procedures for implementing RPL is managed and developed by the Student Admission and Selection Committee in conjunction with an internal Certified RPL Specialist(s).

This RPL Policy document provides a broad enabling framework for RPL. To this end, this Policy document should be read in conjunction with the student admission requirements as laid out in the Student Recruitment and Selection Policy document.

9.3 Certified RPL Advisor

MANCOSA has appointed certified RPL advisors. These work closely with the office of the dean and programme coordinators, and the Student Recruitment and Selection Committee. He/she also assists and guides each candidate through the RPL process.

In terms of candidate support the RPL advisor will do the following:

- Inform the candidates regarding the requirements of qualifications or unit standards;
- Support and guide the candidate in the collection of evidence;
- Help the candidate plan for the assessment;
- Inform the candidate regarding the timing of the assessments; and conduct the assessment and provide feedback.

10. QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGEMENT

Quality assurance management is in accordance with MANCOSA's Quality Assurance Policy. The following structures and processes are involved in the quality assurance management of the RPL process:

- Senate;
- RPL Committee;
- Assessment and moderator system;
- Training of staff;
- Verification procedure in departments;
- Written policy, procedure, student guidelines and academic's manual;
- MANCOSA quality assurance policy. A certified RPL Advisor will monitor the performance of admitted RPL students as well as the effectiveness of the RPL process and provide an annual report to SENEX showing the outcomes.

References

CAEL: 1995. Criteria for quality assurance
 Employment Equity Act (Act 55 of 1998)
 Government gazette No 20844, February 2000
 Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997 as amended)
 SAQA Regulation No. 802: October 2012
 Skills Development Act (Act 97 of 1998)
 NQF Act, 2008 (Act No.67 of 2008)
 White Paper on Higher Education (White Paper 3 of 1997)
 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (November 2013)