INSTITUTIONAL REGULATORY CODE

Policy Framework		Regulations/rules	
Policy	X	Constitution	
Procedure (Manual)		Local document	
Guidelines		Other (name)	

Title: Recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy

Category: Academic

Approval authority: Council

Responsible Officer: Registrar

Designated Officer: Deputy Registrar: Academic Administration

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RPL POLICY

1.   POLICY STATEMENT

The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) addresses the need to adequately increase the access of workers, mature learners and disabled people to higher education institutions (HEIs). Widening access to HEIs for these groups will, amongst other benefits, address the equity and redress imperatives of South Africa.

Towards this end, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) developed a policy on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in the context of the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (2002). In 2013, the founding RPL policy was replaced by the *National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning*. This policy defines RPL as: *"The principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development"*. The aforementioned prior knowledge and skills may have been developed formally, non-formally or informally.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) recently published policies on RPL, credit accumulation and transfer (CAT), and assessment in higher education (August 2016). These publications guide HEIs in the RPL, CAT and assessment processes.

Furthermore, it is the policy of the Central University of Technology, Free State (CUT) to facilitate access to public HEIs, especially for persons who were previously disadvantaged in terms of access thereto, by recognising the prior learning achievements of individuals, irrespective of how these prior learning achievements were acquired. In upholding this commitment, CUT's intention with this policy is not to accredit prior learning achievements, but rather to give due recognition to such achievements in determining access and advanced standing/exemption.

2.   POLICY OBJECTIVES

This policy is intended to guide and regulate the process of identifying, assessing and recognising the skills and knowledge RPL candidates gained from formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

It also serves to standardise the process of recognising credits for articulation and access purposes.

3.   DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Access refers to admission into a particular module/course or programme if a candidate has demonstrated competence through appropriate assessment(s). The candidate challenges the entry-/exit-level outcomes of the module, course or programme preceding the one they wish to access.

Advanced standing is the status granted to a student for admission to study at a higher level than his/her prior knowledge and skills, and/or formal studies would have allowed, including exemption, where applicable.

Assessment refers to the systematic evaluation of a student's ability to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning goals of a curriculum.

Block credit refers to exempting a candidate from the requirements to undertake a block component of a course/programme, for example first/second year or first/second semester, on the basis of proven credentials.

Credits refer to the measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the outcomes specified for the qualification.

Credit accumulation refers to the total number of credits accumulated towards the completion of a qualification.

Credit transfer refers to the vertical, horizontal or diagonal reallocation of credits towards a qualification.

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) refers to an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined in order to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

Designated Officer refers to the most senior officer responsible for operationalising the policy and/or procedures. The Designated Officer has delegated responsibilities to develop and implement the policy and/or procedures on behalf of the Responsible Officer.

Formal learning means learning that occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment, and that is explicitly designated as such. Formal learning leads to the awarding of a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF.

Informal learning means learning that results from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community life, or leisure, including incidental learning.

Non-formal learning means planned educational interventions that are not intended to lead to the awarding of qualifications or part-qualifications.

Not more than 10% of a cohort of students means that the number of students admitted to a programme through RPL should not comprise more than 10% of the total number of students in the programme.

Programme refers to a structured and purposeful set of learning experiences that lead to a qualification.

Qualification refers to a registered national qualification, consisting of a planned combination of learning outcomes with a defined purpose that is intended to provide qualifying students with applied competencies and a basis for further learning, and that has been assessed in terms of exit-level outcomes; registered on the NQF; and awarded by a recognised institution.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) refers to *"the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development" (National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning).*

Responsible Officer means the most senior officer with whom the policy matter most clearly resides. The Responsible Officer has overarching responsibility for the policy and related procedures, and is accountable for the implementation of, and compliance with the policy.

Specified credit refers to the recognition of credit for modules a student has accumulated, regardless of whether or not a qualification was awarded.

Unspecified credit refers to credit not linked to a single, specific subject in the student's new course. Such credit often takes the form of credit marks or exemption from a particular choice alternative of a qualification (i.e. a certain group of subjects as a subsection of a qualification).

Verification refers to the process through which the recommendations from the provider regarding the awarding of credits or a qualification to a candidate are checked.

4. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

4.1 RPL for access

The policy will provide an alternative access route into learning programmes to applicants who do not meet the formal entry requirement for admission to CUT. An RPL application will be evaluated against the entry requirements of the qualification in question.

4.2 RPL for advanced standing/exemption

The policy will provide for the recognition of other forms of prior learning, in order to grant advanced standing in particular programmes by means of exemption from modules or courses at lower levels of the qualification. Exemption from modules or courses in higher education does not translate to credits being awarded for those modules. Instead, the academic record of that student will reflect "exempted" against the modules or courses from which he/she was exempted.

5. APPROACH AND PHILOSOPHY/PRINCIPLES

RPL is located within the transformation discourse, as is evident from the following definition expressed in the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)'s *Report on Transformation at Public Universities in South Africa*: *"A transformed system of higher education is one that is free from all forms of unfair discrimination (whether direct or indirect) and artificial barriers to access and success, as well as one that is built on the principles of social inclusivity, mutual respect and acceptance"*.

CUT subscribes to the following legislated national RPL principles:

a) Full qualifications are not awarded solely on the basis of RPL.
b) RPL may not be used to grant an individual exemption from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any particular qualification. This is in line with the regulation that a person must obtain 50% of a qualification at the institution that will award the certificate for the qualification.
c) Not more than 10% of the cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process. This is a programme accreditation requirement that, under exceptional circumstances, may be waived by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) upon submission of a special request by the institution.
d) RPL is implemented to provide both access and advanced standing/exemption.
e) RPL focuses on what has been learned, and not on the status of the institution, organisation or place where the learning was obtained.
f) Recognition is given for knowledge and skills acquired through experience, and not for experience alone.
g) Prior knowledge is made explicit through assessment and/or other methods that engage the intrinsic development of the acquired knowledge, skills and competencies.

h) Candidate guidance and support, the preparation of evidence, and the development of an appropriate combination of further teaching and learning, mentoring and assessment approaches, are core to RPL practice.
i) The evaluation of prior learning is an academic task, and is executed by academic experts in a given field. Quality assurance of RPL must be undertaken, with the explicit intention to protect the integrity of the processes and outcomes concerned.
j) Advice, counselling and support services should be provided to assist RPL candidates prior to, during, and after RPL processes.
k) An appeals process that would enable RPL candidates to engage with RPL-related judgements, should be established.
l) Candidates are required to contribute towards an RPL administration fee.

In addition to the principles, the following basic institutional principles for RPL apply:

If sufficient proof can be provided of competence in certain skills, the following principles are fundamental to the university's policy on credit transfer:

a) The awarding of maximum credits for prior learning.
b) The awarding of block or specified credit, to minimise the time a candidate will take to complete a qualification.
c) Support for articulation with other HEIs.
d) Admission to university courses is competitive, and creditworthiness does not necessarily guarantee an applicant a place in a course.
e) The relevant Faculty Board decides on the NQF level assigned to specific qualifications, within the framework of this policy.
f) Decisions on which applicants are admitted to specific courses, and the NQF level to be assigned, will be decided at faculty level, in accordance with CUT policy.
g) Credit will be assigned to a subject where, in the opinion of the evaluation panel, there is sufficient overlap between the outcome of the subject, and a subject at the same level of difficulty at another institution.
h) The relevant faculty will award credit at a suitable academic level.
i) Credit will normally not be awarded for subjects completed more than ten years ago, unless there is proof that essential and relevant experience was gained in the meantime.

6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Roles and responsibilities are outlined in the RPL procedure manual.

7. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

The delegations of authority set out in the CUT Delegations Register will apply to this policy.

8. REVIEW OF THE POLICY

The policy will be reviewed on a three-year basis, unless changes in circumstances require an earlier review.

9. REFERENCES

a) National Plan for Higher Education (2001)
b) National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning
c) Recognition of Prior Learning in the Context of the South African NQF (2002)
d) SAQA RPL and CAT policies (2014)
e) CHE policies on RPL, CAT and assessment in higher education (2016)

10.   RELATED DOCUMENTS

a) CUT admissions policy
b) CUT assessment policy
c) CUT Calendar
d) CUT examination policy
e) LS 123 form – Application for subject recognition
f) LS 236 form – Application for RPL