**RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY**

**REVISED MARCH 2023**

# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

HEI Higher Education Institution

PCL Prior Certificated Learning

RPL Recognition of Prior Learning

ZAQA Zambia Qualifications Authority

NQF National Qualifications Framework

**DEFINITION OF TERMS**

The following terms are defined as specified below for the purposes of this document only.

**Accreditation:** a synonym for the recognition of learning as defined in this annexure. In this policy it is used to signify the most formalised and widely practiced forms of recognition**.**

**Appropriate Authority**: means the authority for the time being having responsibility for education, and includes a public or statutory office, body or institution under ZAQA Act No. 13 of 2011.

**Industry**  Labor market comprising employers, workers’ unions, associations and federations.

**Micro-credentials**: these are typically focused on a specific set of learning outcomes in a narrow field of learning and achieved over a shorter period of time.

**Prior certificated learning (PCL):** previously assessed learning considered and, as appropriate, recognised for an award.

**Prior learning:** Knowledge or skills acquired in earlier study and work or through experience.

**Recognition of prior learning (RPL)**: comparison of the previous learning and

experience of the learner how so ever obtained against the learning outcomes required for specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.

**RPL Applicant**  A person who presents himself/herself for RPL assessment

**RPL Assessor** A person involved in the RPL assessment process.

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**1.0 Introduction**

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in Zambia has been applied at various levels in the Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship (TEVET) sub-framework. The RPL assessments have been conducted for more than fifty years mainly in vocational and occupational trades. The RPL policy aims at mitigating barriers and establishing functional and credible systems for recognition of knowledge, skills and competences. This will act as a vehicle for lifelong learning with support systems that promote integrity and quality. The RPL policy recognises learning acquired through various forms.

# 2.0 Background

The Zambia Qualifications Authority Act No. 13 of 2011 was enacted by the Government of the Republic of Zambia to “*provide for the development and implementation of a national qualifications framework; establish the Zambia Qualifications Authority; provide measures to ensure that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable; and provide for matters connected with, or incidental to the foregoing”.*

The Authority is mandated to develop and implement a National Qualifications Framework for the classification, recognition, publication and articulation of quality assured national qualifications with the approval of the Minister. The Authority is further mandated to:

1. Develop and implement policy and criteria, in consultation with relevant awarding and quality assurance bodies, for assessment, recognition of prior learning and credit accumulation and transfer in order to achieve the objectives of the Zambia Qualifications Framework.
2. recognise and validate competences for purposes of certification obtained outside the formal education and training systems;
3. recognise and validate competences for purposes of certification obtained outside the country.

One of the functions of the Zambia Qualifications Authority under the Act No. 13 of 2011 is to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, as well as to offer training and career paths. For this to be achieved, the Government encourages recognition of prior learning as one of the ways of expanding access to education and training. To this end, this document sets out the criteria for recognising prior learning under the Zambia Qualifications Framework.

# 3.0 Aim

To develop and implement a Recognition of Prior Learning system to improve employability and mobility.

# 4.0 Objectives

To provide a framework for recognition of all competencies gained on the job or as a result of informal or unstructured learning experiences. The specific objectives are:

4.1 To increase access to acquisition of formal qualifications through RPL

4.2 To provide national coordination of RPL that will focus on awareness and publicity, advocacy and the main-streaming of RPL in the Zambian Education and Training System;

4.3 To support expanded engagements in RPL by Government agencies, employers and employees, training institutions and RPL practitioners

4.4 To reduce subjectivity in the administration of recognition of prior learning

4.5 To provide clear information on RPL to learners, staff and other stakeholders

4.6 To enhance quality assurance in the recognition of prior learning

4.7 To guide the development and implementation of the RPL policy, including its resourcing, effective delivery and quality assurance;

4.8 To meet the global standards for achieving inclusive and equitable education to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all for sustainable development.

# 5.0 Scope

5.1 This RPL Policy provides for the role of ZAQA in coordinating the development of RPL policies and practices across all sub-frameworks of the NQF, in collaboration with Appropriate Authorities, Awarding Bodies, HEIs, workplaces, recognised professional bodies, employer and employee organisations, other RPL practitioners and learners.

5.2 Principles and Procedures for the recognition of prior learning are described and intended for use by appropriate Authorities and the general public as defined under the ZAQA Act. This policy shall be used in conjunction with the Zambia Qualifications Framework Level Descriptors.

 5.3 This Policy provides guidance on how to develop and implement institutional RPL policy, and is to be used by quality assurance bodies, learning institutions and other stakeholders.

5.4 This Policy applies to:

(a) Regulators, education institutions and skills development providers, workplaces, recognised professional bodies, RPL practitioners and RPL candidates;

(b) All qualifications, micro-credentials registered on the NQF.

# 6.0 Rationale

The aim of recognising prior learning (RPL) in Zambia is to allow learners who have not been able to attend formal education but have managed to gain significant experience in a particular field to be given an opportunity to earn a qualification or to upgrade an existing qualification. This policy recognises equivalences rather than a precise match between experience and academic learning. Assessment of learning from experience, consideration of relevant competences and equivalences contained in the qualification requires a set of agreed criteria, policies and procedures which this document specifies. The RPL process can help individuals to acquire a formal qualification that matches their knowledge and skills. This can then contribute to improving their employability and mobility.

The overall goal of this policy is to standardise the implementation of RPL in Zambia. It is, therefore, necessary that a systematic, nationally approved approach is developed. This will protect the integrity of qualifications assured by the ZAQA.

The following types of learning shall be considered for RPL:

#  6.1 Formal - learning obtained through organised training in a school system from pre-school to university leading to an award such as professional or academic qualifications recognised by the relevant national education

 authorities.

 **6.2** **Non-formal** – any type of structured and organised learning which is intentional and planned by an educational provider, but which does not lead to formal qualifications recognised by the relevant national education authorities

 **6.3** **Informal** - lifelong learning process, whereby each individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from the educational influences and resources in his or her own environment and from daily experience.

**7.0 Policy and Legal Frameworks**

 This RPL policy is anchored on many national and international policy and legal Frameworks. The specific one is the Zambia Qualifications Authority Act No. 13 of 2011 mandated to develop and implement the national qualifications framework; Provide for the registration and accreditation of qualifications; and Provide measures to ensure that standards of registered qualifications are internationally comparable.

# 8.0 Benefits of RPL

There are benefits of RPL to various stakeholders as follows:

 8.1 The benefits for the learner are:

8.1.1 Personal development by gaining credits towards progression into a learning programme.

8.1.2 Access to HEIs.

8.1.3 Promotion or a salary enhancement in an organisation.

 8.1.4 Necessity to abide to a new regulation to protect employment.

8.1.5 Employability, mobility, lifelong learning, social inclusion, self-esteem and avoidance of duplication of learning.

 8.2 The benefits to the industry are:

 8.2.1 Fast tracking workers through the skills recognition process

 8.2.2 Reduction in costs of training

 8.2.3 Reduction in downtime while workers are in training

 8.2.4 Efficient identification of skills gaps allowing for more focused training

8.3 The benefits to HEIs Participating in RPL are:

8.3.1 Widening access to a broader range of learners;

8.3.2 Supporting meaningful partnerships with employers and the community;

8.3.3 Providing more flexible entry routes at different levels;

8.3.4 Facilitates career development planning, employability skills and graduate attributes and lifelong learning.

8.4 Benefits to Employers and Professional Bodies are:

8.4.1 Supporting workforce development planning and targeting of training/ continuing professional development such as up-skilling and re-skilling.;

8.4.2 Promoting learning and personal and professional development as an inherent part of the business activity of employers;

8.4.3 Aiding in recruitment and career advancement decisions;

8.4.4 Providing a means of increasing the motivation of employees and career advancement decisions.

8.4.5 Enhancing workplace/professional practice;

8.4.6 Supporting legislative requirements for a qualified workforce;

8.4.7 Planning for up-skilling and re-skilling of labour force.

8.5 Benefits to the Nation

8.5.1 Addressing the needs of all types of learners;

8.5.2 Supporting economic growth and the human capital agenda;

8.5.3 Supporting social inclusion; lifelong learning and widening participation;

8.5.4 Supporting appropriate use of NQF in RPL;

8.5.6 Enhancing collaboration among various RPL players;

8.5.7 Informing the Government on skill inventory for future planning.

#  9.0 Guiding Principles

There are various methods to measure prior learning based on historical or current evidence of performance. Good practice in assuring and enhancing quality and standards by Awarding and Quality Assurance bodies is guided by the following:

 9.1 policies and procedures should be explicit and fair; and applied consistently;

 9.2 policies and procedures adopted should help an institution to demonstrate that it properly exercises its responsibility for the standards of all awards granted in its name;

 9.3 information available to learners and staff should be clear, explicit and accessible;

 9.3 roles and responsibilities of learners should be clearly defined;

 9.4 learners accessing recognition of prior learning should be given appropriate support to demonstrate their acquired competence/learning

 9.5 policies and procedures should be monitored and reviewed regularly;

9.6 RPL policies shall be applied without discriminating potential candidates seeking certification in Zambia based on any personal attribute including but not limited to disability, ethnicity, tribe, creed etc.

# 10.0 Policy Implementation Guidelines

The following principles will guide implementation of RPL:

*10.1 Confidentiality*

All information regarding RPL Assessment of an individual will be treated with confidentiality. Assessors shall have the responsibility to maintain and respect confidentiality.

*10.2 Non- Discrimination*

All RPL applicants shall access all services without discrimination.

*10.3 Inclusiveness*

This principle acknowledges the role of participation of all stakeholders in promoting the RPL process

*10.5 Sustainability*

The implementation of RPL may involve multi-sectorial collaboration to ensure sustainability.

# 11.0 Principles

Principles to guide RPL are: Policies and procedures; Information; Roles and responsibilities; Support; and Monitoring and review

**11.1 Policies and Procedures**

This policy will be guided by the following principles:

##  11.1.1 Principle 1

**Decisions regarding the recognition of prior learning should be transparent and demonstrably rigorous and fair.**

Appropriate tools to be designed for the process is to be transparent, rigorous and fair. Where recognition of prior learning is being sought for the award of credits, the awarding or quality assurance bodies will assure themselves that the learning derived from experience or prior certificated study is equivalent to that of the learning that might otherwise have been achieved by following the awarding or quality assurance body’s accredited programme of study. In reaching a decision about the equivalence of learning, the awarding or quality assurance body will consider a combination of skills and learning outcomes as well as the level and relevance of the subject knowledge and understanding to be evidenced by a learner.

As with other methods used to assess student's learning and achievement, the awarding or quality assurance bodies will want to ensure that the decision- making process used to assess a claim for the recognition of prior learning, and the outcomes of this process, are transparent, consistent, repeatable and demonstrably rigorous and fair.

## 11.1.2 Principle 2

**Where limits are compulsory on the proportion of learning that can be recognised through the accreditation process, such limits should be explicitly stated. The implications for progression, the award of a qualification and its classification should be clear and transparent.**

1. In recognising prior learning, the awarding or quality assurance body will describe and explain their decisions for stipulating limits, if any, on the volume of learning that can be achieved through the recognition process. Limits may be applied to the smallest or a maximum amount of learning that can be accredited or claimed. For example, a module or cluster of learning outcomes may be applied for recognition.
2. When deciding whether limits are compulsory on the proportion of a qualification that may be recognised, the awarding or quality assurance body shall consider the appropriateness of the use of credits to award or claim exemptions.
3. The awarding or quality assurance bodies may also wish to include in their submission consideration of whether learning derived from experience which is successfully accredited should be graded and, if so, how. Similarly, useful consideration may also be given to whether grades awarded by other awarding or quality assurance bodies can be accepted, when a claim for the recognition of prior certificated learning has been successful.
4. Learners will need to be made aware of any limitations to progression or the range of qualification classifications that are normally available in a programme of study, which may apply if their application is successful.

## 11.1.3 Principle 3

**Prior experiential or certificated learning that has been accredited by the awarding or quality assurance bodies shall be clearly identified on student transcripts.**

The awarding or quality assurance body shall identify how the recognition of prior learning may be stated on student transcripts of learning.

# 11.2 Information

##  11.2.1 Principle 1

**The awarding or quality assurance bodies shall provide clear and accessible information to learners, teaching and instructional staff, examiners, assessors and stakeholders about its policies, procedures and practices for the recognition of prior learning in accordance with the ZQF Level Descriptors.**

The awarding or quality assurance bodies shall develop their own policies, procedures and practices for the recognition of prior learning, reflecting their individual organisational structures and missions.

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##  12.2.2 Principle 2

**The terminology, scope and boundaries used by the awarding or quality assurance body in its policies, procedures and practices for the recognition of prior learning shall be explicitly defined in information and guidance materials.**

The awarding or quality assurance bodies shall clearly set out and unambiguously define the terms they have adopted in the documentation setting out their policies, procedures and approaches regarding recognition of prior learning.

## 11.2.3 Principle 3

**Information and guidance materials outlining the process for assessing claims for the recognition of prior experiential or previously certificated learning shall be clear, accurate and easily accessible.**

Each of the stages in the process for the assessment of claims for the recognition of prior experiential or prior certificated learning shall be carefully and clearly identified.

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##  11.2.4 Principle 4

**The awarding or quality assurance bodies shall state the range and form of assessment appropriate to consider claims for the recognition of prior learning.**

The awarding or quality assurance bodies shall state the range of assessment tools to be used in assessing claims for the recognition of prior learning and the appropriateness of such tools depending on the area of specialisation.

##  11.2.5 Principle 5

**Criteria to be used in judging a claim for the recognition of prior learning shall be made explicit to learners, teaching and instructional staff, stakeholders as well as assessors and examiners.**

The process, rules and regulations for assessing an application for recognition of prior learning shall be clearly stipulated by the assessor**.**

**11.2.6 Principle 6**

**The assessment of learning derived from experience shall be open to internal and external scrutiny and monitoring within institutional quality assurance procedures.**

The assessment of learning derived from experience should, in general, be subject to the same institutional internal and external quality assurance procedures as assessment of learning through more traditional routes.

# 11.3 Roles and Responsibilities

**Principle 1**

**The scope of authority and responsibilities for making and verifying decisions about the recognition of prior learning should be clearly specified.**

The awarding or quality assurance bodies shall outline clearly where the authority lies for making the decision to accredit learning derived from experience or prior certificated study, and the procedures to be followed. ZAQA shall ensure Appropriate Authorities develop RPL guidelines for their subframeworks.

## 11.4 Support

## 11.4.1 Principle 1

**Awarding and Quality Assurance bodies shall give clear guidance to learners about when a claim for the recognition of prior learning may be submitted, the time-scale for considering the claim and the outcome.**

The procedure for RPL shall clearly stipulate time-lines for submission of claims by applicants and processing of applications. .

##  11.4.2 Principle 2

**Awarding and Quality assurance bodies shall make appropriate arrangements to support learners submitting claims for the recognition of prior learning and to provide feedback on the applications.**

The procedure for RPL shall clearly provide for adequate guidance to the applicants for preparing applications and for timely feedback.

# 11.5 Monitoring and Review

**Principle**

**Arrangements for the regular monitoring and review of policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning should be clearly established. Such arrangements shall be set within established institutional frameworks for quality assurance, management and enhancement.**

11.5.1 Regular review of policies and practices will enable the awarding or quality assurance body to assure itself, learners, partner organisations and stakeholders of the quality of its approach towards the recognition of prior learning and the maintenance of academic standards.

11.5.2 The assurance of quality and standards shall be included in an institution's general procedures.

 11.5.3 ZAQA shall conduct audits to monitor implementation and adherence to RPL by Appropriate Authorities managing institutional policies in their sub-frameworks.

# 12.0 Complaints and Appeals

 12.1 A candidate shall have a right to appeal following established procedures.

 12.2 The Appropriate Authorities, Awarding Bodies shall handle complaints and appeals arising from the RPL process as the need may arise.

12.3 Complaints about the RPL and assessment process by candidates or any stakeholder shall be lodged within three months of the initial decision by the Awarding body and concluded within three months from the date of receipt by Awarding body.

12.4 All complaints and appeals shall be directed to the Appropriate Authorities managing the sub-frameworks.

# 13.0 Fees and Charges for RPL

Fees and Charges for processing of RPL claims shall be determined by the Appropriate Authority in consultation with the assessment centres.

## 14.0 Policy Review

This policy shall be reviewed after five (5) years from official date of publication or as need arises following predetermined guidelines.