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BOARD NOTICE 19 OF 2021



ENSURING THE  
EXPERTISE TO GROW  
SOUTH AFRICA

**Recognition of Prior Learning Policy**

**RPL-POL**

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## DEFINITIONS

**Access** refers to the provision of ease of entry to appropriate levels of education and training for all prospective applicants in a way that allows progression.

**Authentic** refers to evidence that must be attributed to the applicant.

**Currency** refers to evidence that must be related to current competence.

**Progression** refers to ensuring that the framework of qualifications allows individuals to move through the levels of national qualifications

**Qualification** refers to a registered national qualification consisting of a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose, intended to provide qualifying students with applied competence and a basis for further learning and which has been assessed in terms of graduate attributes, registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and certified and awarded by a recognised institution.

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** is a process through which formal, non-formal and informal learning are measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts and certified against the requirements for credit, access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system or workplace.

**Sufficient** refers to enough appropriate evidence to meet all criteria needed to certify the applicant as competent and it proves that the performance can be repeated.

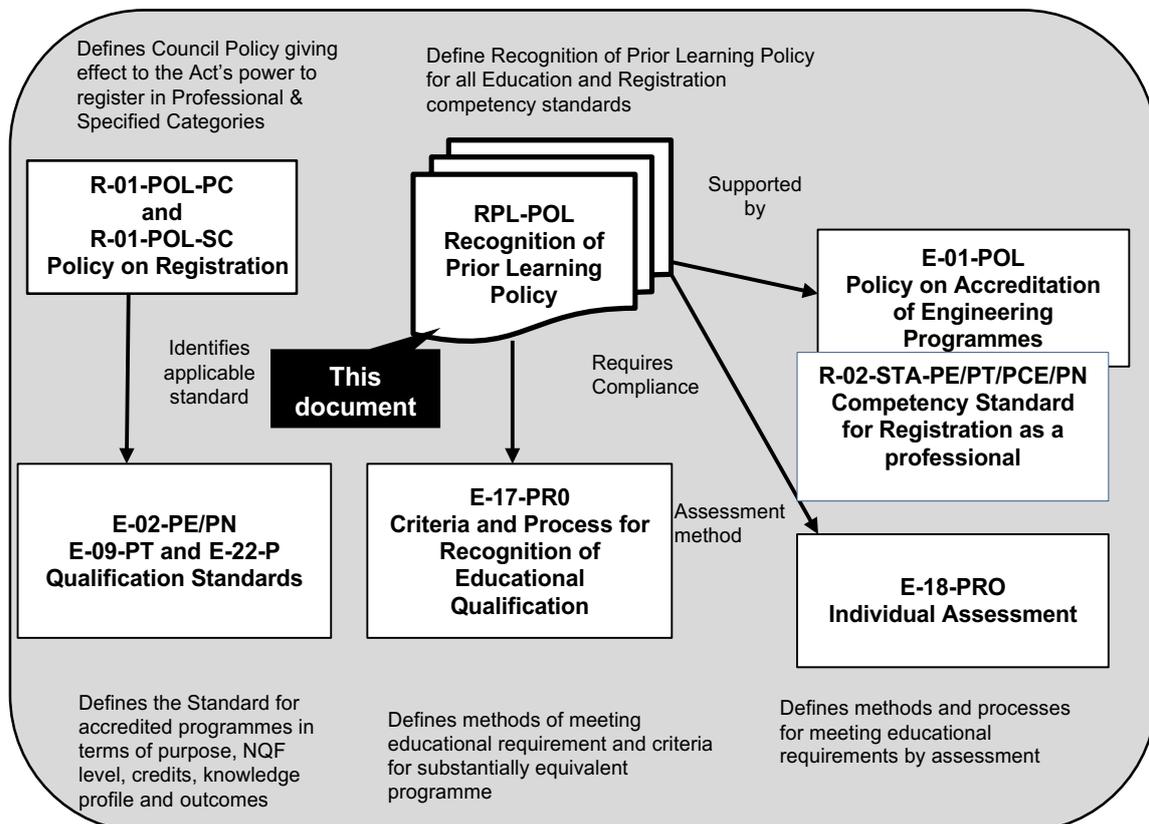
**Valid** refers to the evidence that relates to the specific standards and criteria to be assessed.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

CBE	Council for the Built Environment
CHE	Council of Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher education and Training
ECSA	Engineering Council of south Africa
EPA	Engineering Professions Act, 46 of 2000
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualification Sub Framework
IEA	International Engineering Alliance
IPD	Initial Professional Development
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NQF	National Qualification Framework
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority

## BACKGROUND

The documents that define the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) system for accreditation of programmes meeting educational requirements for professional categories are shown in Figure 1 which also locates the current document.



**Figure 1: Documents defining the ECSA Accreditation System**

ECSA defines RPL as in Section 19(2)(b)(iii) and (4) of the Engineering Professions Act, 46 of 2000 and compels ECSA to consider the submission of evidence of prior learning in engineering in its registration process taking into account “previous learning and experience of an applicant, how so ever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification and the acceptance for the purpose of qualification of that which meets those requirements.”

This policy considers all RPL policies identified in section 3 below, specifically those in compliance with the new Higher Education Qualification Sub Framework (HEQSF), skills development providers, workplaces, RPL practitioners and RPL candidates.

## **1. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

The purpose of this RPL Policy is to provide a strong enabling policy environment for the further development and implementation of RPL policy across the post-school education and training system, and across all levels of the NQF. To do so, this Policy establishes a coordinating mechanism for RPL, the funding thereof and the establishment of a fund for RPL implementation. It provides a firm policy statement to ensure that the NQF Act objectives are met, and especially to:

- facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education and training and career paths, (section 5(1)(b) of the NQF Act); and
- accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities (section 5(1)(d) of the NQF Act).

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY FRAMEWORK ON RPL**

The objectives are to:

- meet the requirements of the Act in so far as to give credence to those persons presenting evidence of prior learning in engineering for registration as a Professional, a Candidate or in a specified category and as a specified category candidate
- facilitate recognition of competency and registration status for those applicants who do not fall within the accepted benchmark routes to registration
- broaden the entry routes into the profession and in so doing reduce the risk of danger in the interest of health and safety
- be aligned to the CBE policy on RPL
- be in compliance, where applicable, with the SAQA National Policy, QCTO RPL-001/14 Policy for the Implementation of RPL
- be in compliance, where applicable, with the CHE policies on the RPL.

## **3. PRINCIPLES FOR RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

The principles embedded in this policy on assessment for RPL are as follows:

- The assessment must be credible, using various methods and instruments.
- The cost of RPL must be transparent and cost effective.
- Evidence must be valid, authentic, current and sufficient.
- Assessment must be planned and designed on the basis of understanding the requirements of previously accepted unit standards, part and whole qualifications, SAQA level descriptions and NQF level ratings.
- Moderation and quality assurance of the assessment must be undertaken.

- The system, process, competency requirements and assessment of RPL must be simple and easily understood.
- The system must comply with the requirements in the latest edition of the following policies
  - SAQA National Policy and the QCTO RPL-001/14 Policy for the Implementation of RPL
  - CHE policies on RPL
  - CBE Framework on RPL
  - NQF RPL co-ordinating Policy

#### **4. POLICY STATEMENT**

The implementation of RPL in general seeks to facilitate access to and mobility and progression within education, training and experience in arriving at a defined competency level in the workplace. It is, however, restricted by the different teaching and learning methodologies among technology and engineering science programmes.

##### **4.1 Specified Categories**

The Specified Category Alternate route allows experience of a defined standard and duration to be accepted in lieu of academic qualifications. The criterion-based method of meeting education requirements by evaluation and assessment is defined in **E-17-PRO-SC**.

##### **4.2 Professional Engineering Technicians and Technologists**

The educational base qualifications for the registration of Professional Technicians and Technologists is assessed not only through the benchmark qualifications presently provided through the suite of NATED 151 qualifications and the new HEQSF suite of educational programmes, but also through an engineering base qualification starting at least at NQF level 4. This is combined with Initial Professional Development (IPD) courses and a time period of working in engineering and responsible engineering at the designated NQF level and the International Engineering Alliance (IEA) Level Descriptors of Well Defined Activities and Broadly defined activities referred to in the Registration Document **R-02-STA-PE/PT/PCE/PN**.

##### **4.3 Professional Certificated Engineers**

The educational base qualifications for appointment as a Certificated Engineer, are a recognised engineering qualification, which requires varying periods of in-service training and experience.

Registration as a Professional Certificated Engineer in terms of document **R-02-STA-PE/PT/PCE/PN** requires the applicant to possess relevant skill, knowledge and experience to carry out broadly defined work. Registration in addition requires the applicant to hold a responsible appointment in terms of one of the Acts.

#### **4.4 Professional Engineers**

The educational base qualification for registration as a Professional Engineer is the South African Accredited engineering degree in compliance with **E-02-PE** or **E-22-PE**, or a suite of qualifications as indicated in ECSA educational policy **E-17-PRO**.

Registration as a Professional Engineer is dependent on the applicant meeting the requirements stipulated in Document **R-02-STA-PE/PT/PCE/PN** at the IEA level descriptors of Complex Activities.

### **5. APPLICABLE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK**

Section 19(2)(b)(iii) and (4) of the Engineering Professions Act, 46 of 2000 compels ECSA to consider the submission of evidence of prior learning in engineering in its registration process taking into account “previous learning and experience of an applicant, how so ever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification and the acceptance for the purpose of qualification of that which meets those requirements”.

*This policy must be read in conjunction with:*

- The Council for the Built Environment (CBE) Act, 43 of 2000 and with ECSA’s individual policies being aligned to the CBE framework
- The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) 2013, that served as a guide for ECSA in the development of its own RPL implementation policies inclusive of ECSA’s professional requirements.
- The Council on Higher Education (CHE) policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education (August 2016).
- National Qualifications Framework Act, 67 of 2008; Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy (February 2016).
- SAQA’s Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation for the Purposes of the NQF Act, 67 of 2008 (as amended, March 2018)

- QCTO Policy for the implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

## 6. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMPLIANCE

ECSCA is recognised internationally under the auspices of the IEA via the following:

### 6.1 Educational Accords:

- Washington Accord (WA)
- Sydney Accord (SA)
- Dublin Accord (DA).

### 6.2. Competency Agreements:

- International Professional Engineers Agreement (IPEA)
- International Engineering Technologist Agreement (IETA)
- Agreement for International Engineering Technicians (AIET).

ECSCA is not a member of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Engineer Agreement (one of the 4 competency agreements) due to South Africa's geographical position.

## 7. POLICY PROVISIONS

The principles embedded in this policy on assessment for RPL are as follows:

- The assessment must be credible, using various methods and instruments.
- The cost of RPL must be transparent and cost effective.
- Evidence must be appropriate.
- Assessment must be planned and designed on the basis of understanding the requirements of previously accepted unit standards, part and whole qualifications, SAQA level descriptions and credit ratings.
- Moderation and quality assurance of the assessment must be undertaken.
- The system, process, competency requirements and assessment of RPL must be simple and easily understood.
- The system must comply with the RPL model as described in section 7.1 below.

### 7.1 ECSCA RPL Model

The ECSCA model on RPL is embedded in the following ECSCA approved policy documents.

- Criteria and Processes for Recognition of Educational Qualifications for Professional Categories – **E-17-PRO**

- Criteria and Processes for Recognition of Educational Qualifications for Specified Categories – **E-17-PRO-SC**
- Assessment of Educational Achievement in Professional Categories – **E-18-PRO**
- Policy on Registration of persons in Professional Categories – **R-01-POL-PC**
- Policy on Registration of persons in a Specified Category – **R-01-POL-SC**
- Competency Standard for Registration as a Professional Engineer – **R-02-STA-PE/PN/PT/PCE**
- Competency Standard for the Registration in a Specified Category – **R-02-STA-SC**.

Each policy irrespective of whether it is referenced to professional categories or specified categories defines four methods of meeting the educational requirements for registration either as a Candidate, or registration as a Professional or Specified Category Practitioner. This is detailed in document **E-17-PRO**.

ECSA also emphasises the accumulation of a combination of qualifications and Initial Professional Development (IPD) credits, at the appropriate NQF level coupled with work place experience in recognising a qualification as substantially equivalent to meet the minimum educational requirements to register as an Engineering Practitioner or Candidate Engineering Practitioner.

- Credits are awarded for knowledge and skills and not for experience alone.
- Detailed requirements for the various methods of satisfying the educational requirements for registration are set out in the documents tabled in 7.1 of this document.