



# Recognition of Prior Learning Policy

CEDAR INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY NPC

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## Purpose

- 1) Cedar International Academy NPC (hereafter called Cedar) recognises that learning takes place in a broad range of contexts including work-based experience, life experience, self-tuition, skills development programs, or higher education provider programs. Granting advanced standing for prior learning ensures that students commence study at a level that recognises their previous learning experiences.
- 2) Cedar aims to serve the local community and endeavours to customise the support to help those who do not meet specific qualification entry requirements. This involves offering alternate admission pathways such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an alternative access route.
- 3) This policy provides a general RPL framework to guide the application and evaluation process of relevant prior learning and experience.
- 4) Cedar's institutional RPL policy is aligned with the following national policies:
  - a. SAQA - National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL (Amended in March 2019)
  - b. DHET - National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (No 67 of 2008). Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy
  - c. CHE - Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in Higher Education August 2016.

## Scope

- 5) This policy applies to RPL applicants (all students and potential students who wish to receive formal recognition at Cedar for previous learning) and staff involved in the RPL process. Relevant documents include:
  - a. this policy;
  - b. Procedures Manual;
  - c. RPL application form; and
  - d. assessment tools.
- 6) This policy does not provide for advanced standing for modules passed at another accredited higher education institution. Learning resulting from formal routes will normally be recognised via the Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) process. However, in cases where CAT is found not to be applicable, the RPL route may be explored (CHE Policy 4.2.1).

## Policy Provisions

- 7) RPL serves two purposes. It either provides alternative avenues to gaining course admission *or* allows exemptions from modules in which learning outcomes have been satisfied by prior learning.
  - a. RPL for *access*:
    - i. promotes inclusion by overcoming access barriers to higher education and providing alternative admission routes;

- ii. is based on an evaluation of informal and non-formal learning (applicants may be granted admission to a Cedar course for which they otherwise do not meet the admission requirements);
  - iii. is evaluated against the admission requirements of the qualification in question; and
  - iv. recognises relevant forms of prior learning in place of normal minimum admission requirements for those who:
    - (1) lack formal prerequisites;
    - (2) do not hold a National Senior Certificate with passes at levels accepted for direct admission to Cedar qualifications; or
    - (3) are adult learners seeking to commence higher education studies.
- b. RPL for module *credits*:
- i. are based on an evaluation of informal and non-formal learning. Applicants may be exempted from certain lower-level modules that are normally required as part of a qualification programme.
  - ii. a granting of advanced standing is an acknowledgement that a student has the knowledge, understanding and skills measured against the learning outcomes of particular modules offered by Cedar.
  - iii. to make provision for the awarding of credits for, or towards a qualification or part qualification registered on the NQF

## Policy Rules

- 8) RPL may be explored only in cases where CAT is not applicable.
- 9) RPL is granted for whole modules only; that is, advanced standing will not be granted for part of a module offered at Cedar.
- 10) Full qualifications cannot be awarded solely based on RPL.
- 11) RPL cannot be used to grant an individual exemption from more than 50% of the modules required for any Cedar qualification offered. Consequently, a student must obtain at least 50% of a qualification through the completion of modules at Cedar for any given qualification.
- 12) The same evidence used in an RPL application to obtain access or credit exemption to a qualification may not be reused in another application.
- 13) Applications will be subject to customised assessment criteria, and the compilation of a portfolio of evidence. Assessment may include:
  - a. presentations;
  - b. essays;
  - c. performance testing;
  - d. examples of work;
  - e. special projects;
  - f. reports, critiques, articles;
  - g. literature reviews;
  - h. interviews or debates; or

- i. satisfactory completion of a challenge examination, oral examination, access test or placement test.
  - j. written tests
  - k. other evidence that may be requested
- 14) As the RPL assessment process is not a regular process, applications for RPL must be made well in advance of the course enrolment period.
  - 15) Advanced standing awarded through RPL will lapse if the student fails to complete module(s) in the course selected or does not remain enrolled in that course.
  - 16) Eligibility for RPL does not guarantee a place in any course.
  - 17) If an applicant does not qualify for RPL, alternative learning pathways may be advised by the RPL Practitioner.
  - 18) If RPL is a possibility, the applicant makes a formal application through the prescribed documentation procedure (RPL Application Form).
  - 19) The RPL Practitioner will ensure that the applicant is supported throughout the process.
  - 20) RPL is evidence-based via the use of a portfolio and/or customised assessments.
  - 21) Where the potential for RPL is identified, an Evidence Plan is developed outlining what evidence and/or assessments are necessarily based on the requirements of the course/module curriculum, having regard for the applicant's context.
  - 22) RPL applicants must cooperate with Cedar's RPL Practitioner by providing sufficient evidence for evaluation.

## RPL Procedures

- 23) A potential RPL applicant approaches Cedar and, through an interview, the potential for RPL is determined either for course access or module exemptions.
- 24) **Step 1:** Determining the purpose and scope of the qualification/module(s):
  - a. Discuss and identify the applicant's study goals and intentions.
  - b. Determine the outcomes of the relevant qualification/module(s) in question.
- 25) **Step 2:** Determining the evidence required for evaluation/assessment purposes:
  - a. Determine learning outcomes and assessment criteria for which the applicant must collect evidence or assessment tasks to be set.
  - b. Evaluate practicability of RPL with regards to time, resource and facility constraints.
- 26) **Step 3:** Identify modules for possible RPL credits:
  - a. Skills and knowledge gained through prior work and must align with learning outcomes of relevant modules.
  - b. Exemption for credits obtained through formal studies at other universities or colleges must be applied for through the Credit Accumulation and transfer process at Cedar.
- 27) **Step 4:** Gathering evidence/completing assessments
  - a. The RPL applicant compiles a Portfolio of Evidence, based on the Evidence Plan and in consultation with the RPL practitioner.
  - b. Any relevant assessments identified by the RPL Practitioner are completed and submitted.

- 28) **Step 5:** Determining applicant eligibility and feedback
- a. The RPL practitioner evaluates whether sufficient evidence has been provided to present to the RPL Panel.
  - b. The RPL Panel compares evidence provided and/or assessment results, against corresponding outcomes of the relevant course or module(s).
  - c. The RPL panel provide feedback to the candidate.
- 29) **Step 6:** Determining further steps:
- a. If learning outcomes are mostly satisfied, determine whether further assessments or evidence can be sourced to satisfy outcomes not met.
  - b. If the applicant does not satisfy module requirements, or if the applicant has insufficient means of providing evidence, the RPL Practitioner in consultation with the RPL Panel and applicant shall determine whether more evidence can be gathered or whether RPL is not a feasible option.
- 30) The fundamental principles of evidence quality include:
- a. **Validity:** evidence must relate to the relevant outcomes and criteria to be assessed.
  - b. **Authenticity:** evidence must be attributable to the applicant.
  - c. **Sufficiency:** there must be enough evidence to allow an informed judgement of whether the applicant has met the requirements for competence.
  - d. **Currency:** the applicant must demonstrate current knowledge and skills relevant to the specific discipline/subject area.
  - e. **Practicable:** the applicant must be able to do the portfolio or put it into practice successfully.

### Portfolio of Evidence Procedure

- 31) The RPL applicant compiles a Portfolio of Evidence, based on the Evidence Plan in consultation with the RPL practitioner.
- 32) The Portfolio of Evidence is reviewed by the RPL panel.
- 33) Based on the Evidence Plan, the Portfolio of Evidence is evaluated:
- a. If the Portfolio of Evidence is insufficient, the RPL practitioner details what further evidence is required.
  - b. If the Portfolio of Evidence is deemed unacceptable and it is recommended that the RPL process be discontinued, a report is written by the Registrar or RPL Practitioner detailing the reasons for the decision. The RPL practitioner will then advise the applicant on alternative learning pathways.
  - c. If the Portfolio of Evidence is deemed acceptable, an RPL Assessment Plan is compiled to assess the Portfolio of Evidence. The Assessment Plan must detail how competence is to be assessed against the required module outcomes.

### Assessment Approach

- 34) The assessment focuses on identifying what has been learned, not on the method, status, or place of prior learning.

- 35) When evaluating an RPL applicant, Cedar may use a broader approach than the regular assessment criteria used in assessing module outcomes depending on the context of the applicant's background. Moreover, rather than consisting of assessment processes only, RPL includes 'translation' of informal and non-formal bodies of knowledge into their formal and structured equivalents based on specific competencies.
- 36) Assessment criteria should seek to accommodate the knowledge and skills gained by the learner in terms of their value for the envisaged course of study. In response to the uniqueness of each individual case, consideration should be given to the fact that prior knowledge and skills acquired might only be expressed in language and vocabulary that is not necessarily the media of teaching and learning at Cedar.
- 37) When assessing against discipline criteria, suitable staff with the relevant disciplinary expertise will be involved in assessing the learning achieved by RPL.
- 38) All assessments shall be moderated using the Moderation of Assessments ~~Task Design~~ form.
- 39) RPL assessment establishes whether the student/applicant:
  - a. is able to meet module outcomes or competencies;
  - b. is able to embark on a particular course of study in view of previous experience and current knowledge; or
  - c. can be deemed competent or qualified in terms of the assessment criteria embedded in the course/module(s).

### Assessment Process

- 40) An applicant's knowledge, skills and competencies will be assessed by an RPL panel based on carefully designed assessment tasks.
- 41) An applicant found to be 'competent', meeting the required learning outcomes for the module(s), will be notified accordingly by Cedar.
- 42) An applicant found to be 'not yet competent in certain learning outcomes, may either be requested to do additional set work and be assessed at a later date or will be advised to follow the traditional route of study and register for the module.

### Appeals

- 43) An RPL applicant who is not satisfied with the outcomes of the RPL process has the right to appeal in writing to the Registrar.
- 44) The Registrar and Academic Management will review the decision with the Board of Directors and notify the applicant of the decision in writing.
- 45) The decision of the Board of Directors is final, and no further discussion will be entered into.

### Academic Records

- 46) Successful RPL outcomes shall be verified and signed by the Registrar. Such verification shall appear on the original application documentation for safekeeping on Cedar's server.
- 47) Students receiving module exemptions will complete that qualification with a total number of credits that are normally awarded for that qualification.

- 48) Certificates awarded at the successful completion of a qualification will not reflect that an applicant has gained access to a programme or been awarded advanced standing through RPL processes.

## RPL Quality Assurance

- 49) Quality assurance involves RPL application, assessment, reporting and management systems. Consequently:
- a. RPL is structured and organised by clear policies and procedures;
  - b. portfolio/assessment results inform RPL decisions;
  - c. module exemptions are only granted for the relevant programme;
  - d. competent assessors with appropriate discipline expertise evaluate the applicant;
  - e. RPL Practitioners shall register with a professional forum for RPL practitioners which meets the requirements of the National Co-ordinating Mechanism for RPL and undertake Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for RPL practitioners, meeting professional requirements;
  - f. personnel involved in assessment have adequate training or experience;
  - g. assessors engage in professional development as opportunities arise from time to time;
  - h. applicants will be supported throughout the process;
  - i. RPL transparency will be achieved through well-documented processes; and
  - j. Cedar ensures that all RPL applicants are treated with fairness and justice, and that processes and procedures are reasonably practicable.

## Review of Policy

- 50) The RPL policy is reviewed at least every 5 years (or as the need arises).
- 51) The review process considers the following:
- a. RPL policy alignment to legislation and regulations;
  - b. consistency and fairness of RPL practices and admissions;
  - c. RPL staff capacity and resources;
  - d. timelines and logistical challenges; and
  - e. data management.
- 52) Any inadequacies or required improvements identified in the review process will inform a subsequent policy update.

## Access to information

- 53) Information based on this policy is public information and must be published as a registration requirement.
- 54) RPL information will be made available on Cedar's website.

- 55) Academic Management will ensure that all staff engaged in RPL are informed of the processes and issues involved, and the potential barriers commonly experienced by adult learners seeking to enter higher education.

## Glossary

**Advanced Standing** is the recognition of prior studies taken at other institutions that have equivalence to similar studies at Cedar. This means that once advanced standing is given, the student is not required to study these Cedar modules.

**Assessment Plan** describes how the applicant will be assessed for RPL. This includes assessing the Portfolio of Evidence and may include further written tests or completion of other assessment tasks.

**Challenge Examination** is an examination that a discipline may require a student to successfully complete before granting advanced standing based on non-formal prior learning for a specific Cedar module. Examinations may incur a fee at the discretion of Academic Management.

**Credit** – recognition granted for meeting the requirements and learning outcomes of a module at Cedar. Each credit corresponds to ten notional study hours.

**Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)** is a term that is used to refer to the mechanism for promoting articulation between qualifications within a sub-framework of the NQF. The purpose of CAT is to provide for the mobility of students and enhance their chances to successfully complete their qualifications. CAT also provides for articulation across the sub-frameworks of the NQF to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. Only formal learning is considered for CAT.

**Evidence Plan** is a formalised plan for gathering and compiling the required evidence on which the RPL applicant will be assessed. This evidence is compiled into the Portfolio of Evidence. The evidence plan is based on the requirements of the curriculum, in particular, the outcomes and assessment criteria. The required evidence may include further written tests or completion of other assessment tasks.

**Experiential learning** – see Informal Learning

**Formal learning** consists of programmes or courses undertaken with recognised higher education providers. Such learning has already been assessed by an educational establishment within the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF). Formal learning leads to the awarding of a qualification or part qualification registered on the NQF and may apply to credit accumulation and transfer.

**Informal learning** means learning has been gained from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community, leisure or life experience including incidental learning.

**Informative examination** means an examination written to establish the ability of the applicant to achieve the exit level outcomes of the intended programme of study.

**Moderation** in RPL assessment means verification that RPL assessment systems are credible and reliable and that assessors and applicants behave ethically; and that the RPL assessments are credible, fair, valid, reliable and practicable.

**Non-formal learning** means planned educational interventions that are not intended to lead to awarding of qualifications or part qualifications, for example, professional short courses and in-service training courses.

**Portfolio of Evidence** constitutes all required evidence identified in the evidence plan. The RPL applicant will be assessed on the evidence contained in the evidence portfolio.

**Programme** is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification. Programmes may be discipline-based, professional, career-focused, inter or multi-disciplinary in nature. A programme has recognised entry and exit points. All higher education programmes and qualifications must have a core component and may have a fundamental and/or elective component depending on the purpose of the programme or the qualification. The credit allocation for core, fundamental and elective learning will depend on the purpose of the programme or qualification.

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** - the process through which non-formal learning and informal learning are measured, mediated for recognition across different contexts and certified against the requirements for access, inclusion or advancement in the formal education and training system or workplace. RPL can be employed to gain access to, or exemption from modules and/or courses that contribute towards a particular qualification.

**RPL practitioner** is a person appointed within Cedar who is well acquainted with the field of study and acts in a supportive role to the RPL applicant.

**RPL panel** is established by appointment and consists of a trained RPL assessor, an industry representative (where suitable) and academics with relevant expertise from various departments/faculties to evaluate the Portfolio of Evidence against relevant outcomes.

**RPL applicant** is the person applying for RPL.

**RPL Portfolio** contains all documentation concerning a particular RPL applicant.

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## Related Internal Documents

Admission and Registration Policy

Assessment and Moderation Policy

Credit Accumulation and Transfer Policy

Enrolment Application form

RPL Procedures Manual

Quality Assurance Policy