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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)



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saam vorentoe

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¹ Rules Owner: Head(s) of Responsibility Centre(s) in which the rules functions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Council on Higher Education (CHE), as the Quality Council for higher education, has the responsibility to interpret national NQF-related policies and criteria within the context of the higher education sector, and, where necessary, to customise such policies in order for them to relate directly to the specific conditions of the sector. It is in this context that the CHE has developed policies to translate the SAQA policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and Assessment, to speak to the higher education environment. The resulting document is the CHE "Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education", August 2016.¹
- 1.2. This document, in turn, translates the above-mentioned CHE policies to the context of Stellenbosch University (SU).
- 1.3. RPL and CAT are considered together in this regulation since the SU processes involved are closely related.

2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1. ***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 mobility of students and enhance their chances to successfully complete their qualifications. CAT also provides for articulation across the sub-frameworks of the NQF in order to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace. Only formal learning is considered for credit accumulation and transfer (CAT).*
- 2.2. ***Credit accumulation** refers to the totalling of credits towards the completion of a qualification.*
- 2.3. ***Credit transfer** refers to the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification.*
- 2.4. **Formal learning:** credit-bearing learning, within the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF) of degree-seeking or non-degree-seeking students, within SU and other institutions.
- 2.5. **Informal learning:** learning that results from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community life, or leisure, including incidental learning.
- 2.6. **Non-formal learning:** planned educational interventions that are not intended to lead to the awarding of qualifications, for example professional short courses and in-service training courses.
- 2.7. ***Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** is a term that refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and*

¹ Passages in italics in this document are verbatim quotes from the CHE "Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education", August 2016.

rigorously assessed and moderated for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development. RPL applies to informal and non-formal learning only. Learning resulting from formal routes will normally be recognised via Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), but in cases where CAT is found not to be applicable, the RPL route may be explored (CHE Policy 4.2.1).

3. AIM OF THE REGULATION

- 3.1. This regulation is aimed at supporting SU's strategic positioning for the 21st century, as described in the Institutional Intent and Strategy 2013-2018. Through RPL and CAT this regulation endeavours to promote access by and success for students, including those who were previously deprived of access to formal learning environments, and to align SU with overarching national policies. Although this regulation is aimed *inter alia* at redress in a South African context, it may be extended to international candidates for admission at the postgraduate level, particularly in respect of *RPL for exemption* and *CAT for transfer*, as defined in the next section.

4. SCOPE OF THE REGULATION

- 4.1. This regulation provides a quality assurance framework for the recognition of prior informal and non-formal learning within RPL, as well as of formal learning within CAT, with the exception of situations where CAT is found not to be applicable.
- 4.2. This regulation applies to undergraduate and postgraduate academic programmes.
- 4.3. This regulation provides the framework within which
 - 4.3.1. applicants' prior formal, informal and non-formal learning may be evaluated by experts as being sufficient preparation for the envisaged programme when measured against the learning outcomes of the particular academic programme or module(s);
 - 4.3.2. based on such evaluation of formal (where CAT is found not to be applicable), informal and non-formal learning, applicants may be granted admission to an academic programme for which they otherwise do not meet the admission requirements (**RPL for access**);
 - 4.3.3. based on such evaluation of formal (where CAT is found not to be applicable), informal and non-formal learning, applicants may be exempted from certain credits that are normally required as part of the programme (**RPL for exemption**); and
 - 4.3.4. based on such evaluation of formal learning, credits previously completed by the applicants may be transferred to other qualifications (**CAT for transfer**).

5. REGULATION PRINCIPLES

- 5.1. SU endorses the principles of a holistic RPL and CAT approach as formulated in sections 4.1 and 5.1 of the CHE Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education, August 2016, and in particular the following:

- 5.1.1. *RPL seeks to achieve inclusion and to overcome a variety of barriers to access and success in higher education. RPL should be premised on overcoming possible barriers to admission to, or registration for higher education studies for those people who lack the formal prerequisites (CHE Policy 4.1.1).*
- 5.1.2. *RPL is more than a process of assessment: rather, it is a specialised pedagogical process that also includes ‘translation’ of informal and non-formal bodies of knowledge into their formal and structured equivalents based on specified competencies. RPL will require close consideration of the associated epistemologies and specifically of the differentiation between experiential and academic knowledge, and hence of the areas and levels to which RPL can appropriately be applied. It also requires clear understanding of the possible contribution of such informal and/or non-formal knowledge to each particular qualification type in higher education (CHE Policy 4.1.2).*
- 5.1.3. *The process of CAT brings together the diverse features of credit accumulation and credit transfer in order to facilitate lifelong learning. It allows a student’s achievements to be recognised even if the student does not achieve a qualification. Any and all credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification, or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification (CHE Policy 5.1.4).*
- 5.1.4. *The process of CAT ensures the mobility of an individual student between programmes and institutions within the constraining parameters set by the requirements of the specific curricula (CHE Policy 5.1.5).*
- 5.2. SU endorses the fundamental values of the continuous development of individuals, lifelong learning and the redress of inequalities.
- 5.3. SU endorses the value of RPL and CAT as embodied in their purpose, viz. to increase the accessibility of higher education institutions in general, and the academic programmes of SU in particular, within a framework of quality assurance. Increased accessibility in this regard refers specifically to individuals who were previously deprived of access to formal learning environments, whether as a result of systemic or other restrictions, but who can demonstrate that they have achieved a level of learning equivalent to that required for admission to the programme and that they can participate in learning opportunities at the required level.
- 5.4. SU endorses the importance of articulation between programmes of different institutions through CAT.
- 5.5. SU endorses the importance of providing appropriate information to RPL and CAT applicants and assessors.
- 5.6. SU endorses that the application of RPL and CAT must allow for context-appropriate procedures in the different academic environments (faculties, programmes and departments).

- 5.7. SU endorses that all RPL and CAT applicants must be treated with fairness and justice.
- 5.8. SU endorses that assessment instruments and procedures used for RPL and CAT must be valid and reliable.
- 5.9. SU endorses that RPL and CAT processes and procedures must be reasonably practicable.

6. REGULATION PROVISIONS

- 6.1. Recognition of prior formal, informal and non-formal learning is valid for one application year. If an applicant does not register for the particular application year, he/she would have to apply anew for another application year and the evaluation of the re-application will be conducted in the context of the circumstances prevailing at that time.
- 6.2. In the case of RPL for exemption and CAT for transfer:
 - 6.2.1. Exemption and credit transfer may only be granted on a per-module basis, i.e. a complete module of an academic programme is the smallest learning unit for which credits may be exempted or transferred.
 - 6.2.2. The time since the learning was completed may be taken into account, since learning that occurred too long ago may not be relevant at the time of application.
 - 6.2.3. A student may be granted exemption or credit transfer for a maximum of 50% of the credits of a programme, and a maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification. Faculties may impose further restrictions on the number of credits that may be exempted in particular years of specific academic programmes.
 - 6.2.4. A specific set of learning on the grounds of which admission to any postgraduate programme is granted under RPL, cannot also be used for granting exemption of credits within the same programme.
 - 6.2.5. Exemption from module(s), as RPL, can be granted on the strength of short course(s) outside the HEQSF (in other words, non-credit-bearing) completed by the applicant, on condition that the course contents, duration and assessment of the short course are at least equivalent to that of the module(s).
 - 6.2.6. Each credit exempted or transferred, must correspond to ten notional study hours.
 - 6.2.7. The SU forfeits all fees applicable to the exempted modules (note that faculty procedures may include provisions to recover the costs of assessing RPL/CAT applications from the applicant).
- 6.3. In the case of RPL for access:
 - 6.3.1. As far as applications for admission to undergraduate programmes are concerned, statutory and/or programme-specific admission requirements may be waived based on prior learning. Granting access to undergraduate students who do not

meet the statutory requirements regarding admission to bachelor's degree studies is accomplished by means of the route of the Discretionary Powers of Senate, which entails that the relevant dean submits a proposal to the Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching) for recommendation to the Matriculation Board. The statutory requirements determined by the DHET entail:

“For the National Senior Certificate and Independent Examinations Board, a school-leaving certificate with admission to bachelor's degree studies; for all other schooling systems or age exemption (23 or 45), a certificate of university exemption issued by USAf's Matriculation Board.”

- 6.3.2. Applications for admission to postgraduate programmes, the normal admission requirements may be waived based on prior learning, subject to the approval of the relevant faculty board. The approval must be recorded in the faculty board's communications to Senate.
- 6.3.3. Normally not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process, unless exceeding this limit was approved by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as part of the programme's accreditation processes [CHE Policy 4.2.8].
- 6.4. The assessment of prior learning for the purposes of RPL and CAT must always meet standards that correspond with normal learning assessment at SU (i.e. not higher or lower).
- 6.5. A variety of assessments of prior formal, informal and non-formal learning may be used. These assessments may include, but are not restricted to:
 - 6.5.1. A student's performance in admission selection instruments (for example access tests, placement tests, or "challenge examinations" that primarily assess quantitatively).
 - 6.5.2. An assessment of learning portfolios (for example the student submits a set of documents and/or other proof to illustrate his/her prior informal learning).
 - 6.5.3. Supplementary work, to the satisfaction of SU, prior to admission (for example admission to an academic programme is granted on condition that the student has completed supplementary work within a prescribed period).
 - 6.5.4. Formal learning in the form of parts or the whole of academic programmes that were followed at other institutions (for example, university of technology diplomas or degrees). Note the limitations imposed on the recognition of such learning given in section 6.2 in this regulation.
- 6.6. Admission to an academic programme may be subject to supplementary work during the academic programme (for example a student is admitted to a programme on condition that he/she will complete supplementary work during the course of the programme). In these cases, the student is required to complete all the supplementary work before he/she may be awarded the relevant qualification.

7. IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

- 7.1. The implementation of this regulation is the responsibility of the faculties and the Registrar's Division.
- 7.2. Each faculty should formulate and document a set of RPL/CAT procedures that meets the following requirements:
 - 7.2.1. The procedures must comply with this regulation, but may impose additional requirements or limitations where appropriate in the faculty's context.
 - 7.2.2. The procedures are subject to approval by the Academic Planning Committee and the relevant faculty board and are reported in the faculty board's recommendations to Senate.
 - 7.2.3. The procedures must include mechanisms to provide feedback to applicants, handled with the necessary administrative support and uniformly between all departments.
 - 7.2.4. The procedures must include reasonable and clear parameters relating to the costs of services provided in respect of RPL/CAT application, guidance and assessment procedures, to be determined annually (the costs related to RPL/CAT are normally for the account of the applicant and are paid to the faculty that considered the application).
 - 7.2.5. The procedures must include guidelines for applicants regarding the requirements of assessment instruments (for example the guidelines for learning portfolios, and ways in which tests, examinations, interviews and other faculty-specific assessment opportunities are conducted).
 - 7.2.6. The procedures must include guidelines for the process according to which unsuccessful applicants may lodge an appeal.
- 7.3. Each faculty is responsible for making its RPL/CAT procedures available to prospective students and to the staff responsible for applying the procedures.
- 7.4. Applications for RPL/CAT should be submitted to the relevant Faculty Administrator in the Registrar's office, who forwards the application to the relevant structure in the particular faculty, as indicated in the faculty's RPL/CAT procedures.
- 7.5. The faculty sends its decision on the RPL/CAT application to the Faculty Administrator, who is responsible for:
 - 7.5.1. If required by this regulation or the faculty's procedures, submitting the decision to the relevant faculty board for approval and communication to Senate;
 - 7.5.2. Informing the applicant of the decision; and
 - 7.5.3. Recording the decision as a decision of Senate on the student's internal record card. RPL for credit is recorded as exemptions, while CAT for credit is recorded as

credit transfer.

8. REGULATION CONTROL

- 8.1. *Governance structure governing this regulation:* The regulation is determined by the University Council. The Rector is responsible for executing the regulation and delegates overall responsibility to the applicable environments, who report to a member of the Rector's Management Team, namely the Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching).
- 8.2. *Ownership:* In this regard, the Rector appoints the Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching) as line principal and owner of this regulation.
- 8.3. *Roles and responsibilities:* The University has established, amongst others, the following roles and responsibilities with a view to dealing with and managing this regulation:
 - 8.3.1. The Vice-Rector (Learning and Teaching) is responsible for implementing and updating this regulation, and for overseeing the efficient functioning of the curator and related structures and roles.
 - 8.3.2. The Registrar is the curator, and is ultimately responsible for the interpretation and implementation of the regulation.
 - 8.3.3. Deans are responsible for formulating faculty procedures based on this regulation, to be approved in accordance with section 7.2.
- 8.4. *Review:* This regulation will be reviewed every five years, or as needed.

9. MONITORING AND REPORTING

- 9.1. Monitoring and reporting are embedded in the regular management practices, and communication occurs via the regular communication channels of the University.

10. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- 10.1. Applicants who wish to appeal against an RPL or CAT decision should adhere to the appeals procedures of the relevant faculty.

11. DISCLOSURE

- 11.1. This Regulation is a public document and is published on the University's website.

12. REPEAL

- 12.1. This Regulation repeals and replaces all previous RPL policies adopted by SU.

13. REFERENCE DOCUMENT

- 13.1. Council on Higher Education (CHE) Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education, August 2016.