TONGA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATION BOARD

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY

2018

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1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   *Lifelong learning* and *Knowledge society*

Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board (TNQAB) sees learning as the driver of national development, and that education extends beyond the formal education circle into the informal context of real life and self-directed learning. Such principles align well with the concepts of *lifelong learning* and *knowledge society* that encourage individuals to learn their entire life and to make collective, informed and wise contributions to national development.

1.2   Different forms of learning

Throughout life, people acquire a wide range of skills and competences through three broad categories of learning:

   a) *Formal learning*: this refers to the learning in formal education and its different levels such as schools, classrooms, curriculums, etc. Learning in formal education is intentional it is geared towards the attainment of predetermined objectives or outcomes by following a well-structured curriculum and systems of instruction and assessment;

   b) *Non-formal learning*: this refers mainly to the structured learning that happens outside of the formal education circle. Non-formal learning follows some form of curriculum and is geared towards the attainment of broad goals or purposes; and

   c) *Informal learning*: this takes place everywhere, all the time, often without the learner realizing it. This type of learning is driven predominantly by necessity and intrinsic motivation to know more or be able to do something new.

1.3   Non-discriminatory and Inclusive system of recognition

Learning is a fact of life, and people learn to live and live to learn. The skills and knowledge people learn in one context are transferable to many other contexts. Having relevant systems, established at different levels, for the formal recognition of all forms of learning ensures a national education system that is non-discriminatory and inclusive.

1.4   TNQAB values all forms of learning

As a national agency responsible for the formal recognition of learning, it is important that TNQAB maintains an impartial stance in regard to defining and interpreting this word (that is, *learning*) and what can or cannot be regarded as *learning*. TNQAB values all forms of learning, irrespective of how and where the learning takes place. This policy reflects the organization's resistance to entrenched status quo biases that favour formalized learning over other forms of learning.

2. STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY

The authority behind this policy is provided by relevant sections in the following two documents:

2.1 Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board Act 2004, Part II:

Section 8 subsection (b) in the description of the *Rights and duties* of TNQAB as:

> "[to] establish policies, criteria, accreditation, monitoring, reviewing, register and listing of providers of post compulsory education and training" (p. 2).

Section 12 in the description of *Course of study*, which states that:

> "(1) The Board shall approve each course of study leading to a qualification.
> (2) Any person undertaking to teach a course of study shall —
>   (a) hold a registered teaching qualification at least one level higher than the approved course; and
>   (b) have 3 years experience in the field at the level of the course of study.
> (3) Any person who does not comply with the requirements under subsection (2) shall be assessed by an assessor recognised by the Board of the person's prior learning.
> (4) A person who has been assessed under subsection (3) shall be granted ***recognition of prior learning*** [emphasis added] where the assessor is satisfied that he has the skills and theoretical knowledge one level higher than the course of study". (p. 10)

2.2 Tonga Qualifications Framework Policies 2018:

Section 4, subsection 4.9 in which RPL is listed as one of the characteristics of a qualification.

> "4.9 Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
>
>   a) There should be a clear statement concerning how the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through Recognition of Prior Learning, however such learning was achieved." (p. 13)

3. PURPOSES OF POLICY

3.1 Recognition of previously unrecognized learning

First and foremost, this policy enables TNQAB and providers of compulsory education and training in Tonga to take into account the range of skills and competences learners had already acquired before enrolling into formal courses of study (commonly referred to as *recognition of prior learning* or *RPL*), and in turn, encourages wider public access to quality formal education.

3.2 Guides RPL processes

Second, this policy also offers providers of post compulsory education and training in Tonga with general guidelines on how to implement their institutionalized RPL processes in general, and their awarding of RPL credit, in particular.

3.3 Clarifies responsibilities

Last but not least, this policy also clarifies the responsibilities of key players in RPL, namely, the applicant learner, the provider of the unit(s) or course of study into which RPL is sought, and TNQAB.

4.   SCOPE OF POLICY

This RPL policy applies to:

a)   TNQAB registered providers of post-compulsory education and training in regard to their own RPL processes and implementation;

b)   TNQAB regarding RPL requirements for provider registration and programme accreditation;

c)   RPL applications to TNQAB registered institutions; and

d)   RPL applications to national qualifications or individual units of a national qualification.

This RPL policy does not apply to units or courses of study that are offered in compulsory education levels (pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools).

5.   POLICY STATEMENT

5.1   What RPL is

Recognition of prior learning or RPL for short, is a generic term used to refer to the process utilized by a higher education provider to award credit in recognition of learning that has taken place before entry into a course of study. It is an evidence-based academic process that assesses the equivalence or relevance of skills and competences a potential learner claims to have already acquired, to some or all of the learning outcomes of a course of study the learner intends to enroll in.

5.2   Commitment to RPL improves public access to quality education

RPL reflects a commitment to improving access to quality education. It opens up a new pathway to accessing formalized educational qualifications and the diversity of associated benefits, especially to individuals who, in traditional education, would not have the opportunity to be awarded with formal qualifications for their skills and competences.

The award of RPL credit may result in the reduction in both the total length of time required for learning or cost of learning.

5.3   RPL assessment

To award RPL, the awarding institution must ensure that it has the capacity needed for the successful implementation of RPL which include but not restricted to the following:

a)   Necessary resources such human resources with the required expertise, finance, and policies;

b)   Appropriate assessment activities linked to learning outcomes in order to adequately gauge the skills, competences, and knowledge which have been claimed in an RPL application.

5.4   The RPL assessment process

The process of RPL assessment must be:

a) *Fair*: The RPL assessment process must not in any way discriminate against learners. A fair RPL assessment must provide all learners with an equal opportunity to demonstrate the extent of their learning;

b) *Flexible:* The RPL assessment must be structured in such a way to give learners options to demonstrate their learning in the most equitable way. For example, a flexible RPL assessment may require learners to make the final decision as to the format(s) of the assessment that are to be used to assessed their learning;

c) *Reliable*: The reliability of a RPL assessment is about *consistency*:

   o   Consistency of the assessment of the claimed learning; and

   o   Consistency in the interpretation of evidence.

   RPL assessment conducted under the same conditions for the same unit of competency or course of study, different assessors should reach the same decision as to whether the candidate is competent in the claimed learning, based upon the evidence collected.

d) *Valid*: The RPL assessment must be assessing what it is supposed to assess, utilizing the most appropriate strategy.

5.5   Forms of RPL assessment

RPL assessment may involve an applicant doing one or more of the following to demonstrate why his or her prior learning experiences should be recognized or awarded RPL credit:

a)   Attending an interview;
b)   Submitting a portfolio of prior work;
c)   Submitting an essay;
d)   Submitting a reflective account;
e)   Sitting for a written examination;
f)   Performing a task (or tasks), either in the workplace or in a simulated environment, while he or she is being observed and assessed;

5.6   Assessors of RPL

Assessors of RPL are:

a)   Persons with relevant qualifications and expertise in both the content area in which the RPL is being claimed, as well as RPL assessment; and
b)   Registered by TNQAB in accordance with *TNQAB's Guidelines for registration of assessors for national qualifications*.

5.7   The conduct of RPL assessment

The provider of learning units or courses in which RPL is sought is responsible for the conduct of RPL assessment, and the award of RPL credit, following their own institutional processes and procedures that are consistent with this RPL policy.

For RPL for national qualifications, there must be two (2) TNQAB registered assessors assigned to each RPL application:

- External assessor nominated by TNQAB; and
- Internal assessor nominated by the provider from within the relevant teaching unit of the institution.

Refer to subsection 5.6 for more information on RPL assessors.

5.8   Evidences for RPL

RPL is an evidence-based process. All evidences that are provided to support a RPL application must possess the following criteria:

a) *Valid*: The evidence provides information relevant to the unit and/or learning outcomes that are being assessed.
b) *Authentic*: The evidence can clearly demonstrates that the learning that is being assessed are actually the applicant's own work and is not someone else's;
c) *Current*: The evidence is not out-of-date, and that the candidate is still competent at the time of assessment.
d) *Sufficient*: The evidence is enough to convince the assessor that the applicant is competent against all the criteria of the RPL assessment.

5.9   Awarding of RPL credit

The awarding of RPL credit is the culmination of decision-making which involves thorough consideration of the total academic endeavor of the learner, in both the short term and long term. Therefore, RPL credit is only awarded where it is warranted, and in accordance with existing policies and processes.

Two (2) important issues to be considered when deciding whether or not to award RPL credit:

a) That the RPL applicant is not put at a disadvantage by being awarded RPL credit. Examples of such disadvantages:
   o RPL credit may lead to the learner becoming inadequately prepared for further education or the workplace;
   o RPL credit may lead to the learner not meeting the entry requirements for further education;
   o RPL credit may lead to learner dissatisfaction as a consequence of institutional process failures and deficiencies. Relevant polices may not be fit for purpose or are not effective, or staff who may not be sufficiently informed with relevant processes.
   o Etcetera.
b) That the award of RPL credit does not pose any risk to the integrity of the intended course of study and its qualification. The award of RPL credit may pose a risk to the integrity and reputation of a course of study, especially where the claimed prior learning:
   o May not have actually been at the level of complexity consistent with that of the intended course of study;

- o May lead to certain key skills, knowledge and competences in the intended course of study, not being assessed or demonstrated thus leading to uncertainty of graduate outcomes;
- o Is not subjected to a trustworthy RPL assessment process, such as the use of an assessor who may not be sufficiently qualified;
- o Etcetera.

Providers are expected to evaluate the consequences of the awarding of RPL credit, and must act on the interest of the learner, who may not be in a position to fully grasp the broader and long-term impact of receiving RPL credit.

5.10 Who is awarding RPL credit

RPL credit may be awarded by any provider of post-compulsory education and training. However, having an established RPL system is a precondition for TNQAB registration and accreditation.

5.11 Processing the outcome of RPL assessment

a) The result of a RPL assessment must go through a provider's normal formalities for processing of assessment results;

b) The outcome of a RPL application must be communicated to the applicant **within three (3) days** from the final day of the RPL assessment, using a provider's normal format for reporting assessment results;

c) In the case of an applicant failing a RPL assessment, he/she must be given the opportunity for reassessment;

d) Normal assessment fees must apply.

6. FORMS OF RPL CREDIT

Depending on the extent of assessed equivalence or relevance claimed learning, one or more of the following types of credit may be awarded:

a) *Specified credit*: this refers to credit awarded to learning which has been assessed and deemed to be the same or equivalent to that a learner is applying to. Specified credit may be awarded to individual units of a national qualification or a whole qualification;

b) *Unspecified credit*: this refers to credit awarded to learning which has been assessed and deemed not to be exactly the same but relevant to that a learner is applying to. Unspecified credit may be granted as one of more unspecified units or components of a qualification;

c) *Exemption*: this refers to credit awarded whereby a learner is not required to study again a course or part(s) of a course;

d) *Advanced standing*: this refers to the award of RPL credits that allows an applicant to enter a programme later than the normal starting point (e.g. enter directly into the subsequent level of a related group of programmes or qualifications). In the award of such credit, the normal period of registration shall normally be shortened; and

e) *Credit transfer*: credit may also be granted towards a qualification when the learning equivalent to such credit have been successfully completed in a different qualification.

7. KEY DEFINITIONS

a) *Applicant*: refers to a RPL candidate who is applying RPL.
b) *Course of study*: a study programme that lead up to a stated qualification. A course of study comprises units of competencies.
c) *Credit*: a credit refers to the value ascribed to a set of learning outcomes. In the context of RPL, a credit is the benefit granted by a learning provider to a learner, in the form of some or all of the normal requirements for completion of a course of study the learner intends to enroll in, being waived.
d) *Provider qualification*: a qualification that is awarded by a TNQAB registered post-compulsory education and training organization at the successful completion of a course of study designed by the provider and quality assured by TNQAB;
e) *National qualification*: a qualification which was developed in accordance with *TNQAB Guidelines for development and registration of national qualifications on TQF 2018*.

8. APPEALING A RPL ASSESSMENT DECISION

8.1 Appeal to higher authority

A RPL applicant has the right of a single appeal to the next highest responsible authority, such as a managing Board of directors, Registrar's Office, or Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Appeals against RPL towards units or courses of study that lead up to a national qualification, must be submitted to TNQAB, and addressed to the CEO;

8.2 Grounds for appeal

Appeals against RPL decisions in regard to units or courses of study that lead up to a national qualification is an **evidence-based** process. Appealing such decisions without objective evidence will not be considered. An appeal that is simply based on the applicant disagreeing with such a RPL decision will not be accepted.

Appeals against the outcomes of applications for RPL intended for units or courses of study that lead up to a national qualification will be considered:

a) where the grounds of the appeal relate to inconsistencies or irregularities in the conduct of the RPL assessment, or
b) where the grounds of the appeal relate to bias or prejudice, or
c) when there are sufficient supporting evidence for (a) and (b) above.

8.3 Appeal process

Any appeal against an RPL assessment decision must be dealt with in accordance with established institutional processes and procedures. In addition to those in subsections 8.1 and 8.2:

a) An appeal must be received by the relevant authority **within five (5)** working days of the receipt of RPL decision by an applicant;
b) The relevant authority must complete its review of the appeal **within five (5)** working days of the receipt of the appeal request;

c) The outcome of an appeal request must be communicated directly (in person, or email or phone) to the appellant as soon as the appeal review has been completed. A written report is later delivered to the appellant.

d) Standard RLP appeal forms: RPL applications must be lodged using standard RPL appeal forms.

e) TNQAB RPL appeal form: Appealing outcomes of RPL for units or courses of study that lead up to a national qualification must use this form (entitled RPL Appeal Request).

9. RESPONSIBILITIES

9.1 Providers of compulsory education and training

Providers have the following responsibilities regarding RPL:

a) Write institutional RPL policies and guidelines;
b) Establish and implement RPL policies, processes and procedures;
c) Award RPL credits;
d) Document and publish RPL processes and requirements and make them available to learners;
e) Organize and coordinate RPL assessment activities;
f) Communicate RPL results to applicants.

9.2 Responsibilities of RPL applicant:

RPL applicants have the following responsibilities regarding RPL:

a) Enquire about RPL relevant institutions;
b) Study RPL information and apply for RPL credit:
c) Gather and submit evidence for RPL assessment and appeal.
d) Appeal RPL decisions when needed

9.3 Responsibilities of TNQAB

TNQAB has the following responsibilities regarding RPL:

a) Write national RPL policies and guidelines;
b) Establish and implement RPL policies, processes and procedures;
c) Endorse RPL processes and procedures developed by providers;
d) Support providers with their needs for RPL;
e) Collaborate with providers in their RPL for units and courses the lead up to national qualifications;

10. RELATED POLICIES

a) Tonga Education Act 2016 Revised Edition;
b) Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Board (TNQAB) Act 2004;
c) Tonga National Qualifications and Accreditation Regulations 2010;
d) Tonga Qualifications Framework Policies 2018;
e) TNQAB Guidelines for registration of assessors for national qualifications;

f)   TNQAB Guidelines for national qualification development and registration on TQF 2018;

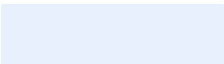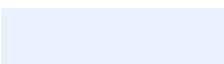g)   TNQAB Assessment Policy for national qualifications 2018.

11. POLICY APPROVAL AND REVIEW

11.1 Approval

This policy was approved by the TNQAB Board of Directors on the following date: 1/22/2019

11.2 Review

This policy will be reviewed in accordance with the schedule for review of TNQAB documents. The revisions are summarized in the table below.

Version #	Section Revised	Date	Details and reasons of review	Approved by & Date
	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	Signature: _____ Date: Click here to enter a date. _____
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	Signature: _____ Date: Click here to enter a date. _____
Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter text.	Click here to enter a date.	Click here to enter text.	Signature: _____ Date: Click here to enter a date. _____

12. APPENDIX

12.1 RPL Application Form (National Qualifications)

TONGA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATION BOARD

APPLICATION

FOR

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

TOWARDS

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Important information to RPL applicant
1. If you wish to apply for RPL in one or more units of competency that lead(s) to a national qualification, you must complete this application form and submit it to your institution who will then forward it to TNQAB.
2. The overall RPL process takes time, so please apply well in advance (say at least 3 - 4 weeks before the beginning of class), as you need the outcome of your application as basis for your enrolment decisions in the coming academic terms.
3. You must receive the outcome of your RPL application before you formally enrol into your intended course of study. Students are not normally allowed to apply for RPL in a unit or course of study after they had enrolled into them.
4. TNQAB and your institution will use the information that you provide in the application form to identify two qualified RPL assessors to work with you on your application:
a. External assessor nominated by TNQAB, and
b. Internal assessor nominated by your institution from within its own faculty.
5. You will be contacted by your RPL assessors to work out a mutually convenient assessment schedule, and also advise you on how to go about collecting RPL evidence.
6. Once the assessment process is completed, your institution will notify you by email and by phone, followed by a letter, of the outcome of the RPL assessment.
7. Should you need to appeal the outcome of your RPL application, you must submit your appeal request within five (5) working days of receipt of the RPL assessment notification, using the TNQAB *RPL Appeal Request Form* which is also available from TNQAB and your institution.
8. The RPL fee is equivalent to the standard tuition fee for the unit for which you are applying for RPL. Please contact your institution to discuss the costs associated with your application.
9. If you need help completing any part of the application, please contact your school.
10. This application form is available from both TNQAB and your institution in print or electronic form.

Part 1: Details of applicant

Last name:		Given name(s):			
Gender:	Female ☐ Male ☐	Date of birth:			
Email:			Day	Month	Year
Telephone:		Mobile:			
Postal address:		Residential address:			

Part 2: Details of intended enrolling institution

Name of institution:	
Email:	Tel or mobile:
Postal address:	Physical address:

Part 3: RPL sought

National qualification code:	
National qualification title:	

Unit code	Unit title	Evidence attached (Indicate with a X)	Brief description of attached evidence
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	

Unit code	Unit title	Evidence attached (Indicate with a X)	Brief description of attached evidence
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	
		☐	

Part 4: Declaration

I declare that the information and documentation provided in the application is true and accurate.

_____   _____

Applicant's signature   **Date**

12.2 RPL appeal request Form