

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING IN THE ARTISAN DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

PRESENTED BY: Ms. Malebo Mogopodi - Lebona

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, comrades and compatriots.

I wish to thank the department for creating a platform and dialogue on this very critical issue of skills development and Artisan development in particular. It may take time to crack it, to do it right and get there but it is through these engagements that we can ultimately get there.

I want to thank the department and the conference convenors for giving me an opportunity to talk on a very critical matter that is close to my heart, Recognition of Prior Learning. I stand here as a voice for the Metalworkers but also for the working class as a whole because RPL is not intended to benefit the employed only but the unemployed as well. For us RPL is about correcting the wrong of the past. I have also been requested by some of our employers within the Merseta to table their concerns and possible solutions to the challenges around Artisan development.

You will agree with me that as we sit here we understand RPL differently, we interpret it differently and we apply it differently. We have different expectations in as far as RPL is concerned, which is understandable because RPL on its own

is very much contested. We have different interests in the matter but one thing is common, RPL is political and it is a mandate that we are all expected to carry and for us as a labour movement, it is for us to defend.

As labour movement we understand RPL as a tool that can change the lives of our people because it is a fact that the majority of our workers including those who are no longer in the employ, have vast experience and knowledge but remain at the bottom of the ladder, as ordinary machine operators and general workers because they do not have the paper to show their worth in terms of skills and experience that they acquired over a period of years..

As the department continue to double their efforts to ensure application and implementation of a coherent RPL system, where Policies and Procedures are put in place and RPL is recognised as one of the routes towards Artisan development, we were over the moon. This is because we were confident that at long last the workers of this country, black workers in particular will ultimately benefit from the system where their experience will be noted and recognised. I am saying black workers, Africans in particular because if you look at SSPs of almost all the SETAs TODAY you will find that it is the black workers, African workers at the bottom of the pyramid despite the amount of money that has gone towards skills and training from the day when SETAs opened their doors to-date.

When RPL was first piloted in the country and tested it was pioneered by Metalworkers and the Mineworkers. This is the second chance given by the department to pilot ARPL again with NUMSA and NUM members companies or industry. And I am going to be talking here from that experience.

Firstly let me share with you our expectations as a labour movement and understanding of RPL including our frustrations. But yes we will also possible solutions.

1. RPL is an assessment process against a qualification for either access or credit
2. Our expectation is that achievement must be recognised no matter how big or small or how many credits or modules. If there are gaps, there has to be GAP Fill programme developed. We certainly do not expect workers to be deemed “not yet competent” because they do not pass all the modules.

And this is because we thought we are all aware that we are dealing with systemic challenges where workers are employed and operate according to job specifics or company specifics, not trade specifics. Quite a few companies expose their workers to Multi Skilling or rotate them across different sections in the company yet when we apply RPL we do so against a full trade qualification. How do you expect us to benefit from RPL in this instance?

With the Trade test regulations we saw the gains we made with the RPL being eroded. We were very disappointed to be told that if a learner passes 9 modules and fails 1 he or she is deemed “ Not yet competent” because He/ she has to pass ALL the modules. This is quite a blow and demoralising

We however welcome the introduction of Part Qualifications and hope this will remedy the situation.

3. RPL process as part a Qualification and learning process.

Whilst we have every qualification with statement “embedded knowledge, including RPL as part of the qualification”, how many service providers or training centres, public or private, do an RPL before workers could go into a learning programme or how many SETAs enforce this? And where is SAQA and the DHET when the system is compromised?

Why do we treat RPL as a stand -alone process instead of it being part of qualification and learning process?

RPL should be applied as part of a qualification as contained in SAQA policies and guidelines.

We propose that RPL be Statutory like your Health and Safety or Forklift Certificate renewal. Workers will have to undergo RPL after a certain period of years to ensure recognition of skill and knowledge acquired.

If RPL is part of a qualification and learning or training programme it will not have to be costed separately but as part of the whole process. Sorry to those who see this as a business opportunity because now even employers who want to do RPL for their workers cannot do so because “RPL is expensive?” Even though we still want to understand as to what makes it expensive?

4. RPL and language barrier

One of the challenges identified in the ARPL Pilot project is the language barrier. Not all of the workers who meet the criteria are English first language speakers and this poses a challenge and another benefit that most of the deserving and disadvantaged will ever enjoy until we have African language first speakers and make the system user friendly for ordinary workers and the working class in general.

The issue of language is related to the issue of Mentors and Assessors, whether in the department or in the workplaces. Yes companies do have their Mentors but most of the Mentors are white, either Afrikaans or English

first language speakers. This is disadvantage for those who are not English or Afrikaans first language speakers. The outcome of the ARPL Pilot proved this fact to be 100% correct. Among all the ARPL candidates in the pilot, that were deemed competent Majority of them are English and Afrikaans first language speakers What does that tell you?

5. Labour as custodians of RPL

We feel very strongly that labour must be part of the RPL process from Step 1 or Phase 1 until the worker exit the process, And the reason is simple we want to satisfy ourselves on the outcome of assessment processes

ARPL REPORT ON THE CURRENT PILOT.

Most companies, NOT ALL, do not support the ARPL for the following reasons

- Time off – they refuse to allow workers time off to undergo RPL
- There is no buy –in from member companies as a result there is no support the ARPL
- Some companies have reservations with the workers qualifying as Artisans as they do not have vacant positions for them
- There is a concern that once workers qualify they will leave
- There is also a concern that once workers qualify they will expect more money.

Most of the candidates were deemed “Not yet competent” because they are not exposed to the whole trade activities but company specific tasks

Language barrier

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

Problem	Ideas around solutions
<p>1 FLC. Labour notes with concern the continued punting of the FLC as a requirement to access a trade test for certain levels of the occupational trades. The FLC was not asked for by labour or industry and will unfairly prejudice our members because we see this as nothing but shifting of the goal post. We acknowledge the challenge of fundamentals but FLC is not the solution and we do not support The occupational trades contain all the theory an apprentice needs. It is also expensive and stands to unfairly benefit the IEB.</p>	<p>Abolish the FLC. It is not needed for those with equivalent qualifications and must be removed as a requirement to access trade tests for occupational trades.</p> <p>Let's be clear- we want it removed, we do not want exemption from FLC training granted and candidates still having to write and pay for the FLC exam. It needs to go. This is a sentiment shared by ALL Labour Unions including employers in the Metal and Engineering industry</p>
<p>2 FLP. Labour notes with concern the proposal to develop an FLP program for artisan learners and especially the need for persons having to undergo this if they have less than 50% in maths and science. Those with 50% or more in maths and science seldom come to artisan learning in any event.</p>	<p>Abolish the FLP and the 50% rule. If a learner has passed maths and science at the required grade that is sufficient.</p>

Similarly a pass in these subjects is sufficient on the understanding that these subjects are at a level similar to the old higher grade and are not easy to get through.

3 Quality and number of feeder systems

In general with some notable exceptions the best candidates for artisan learning programs come from technical high schools. The lack of physical science as a subject in NCV is also a problem.

Try and steer TVET's back to their primary role of providing theory support for artisan training, and not having them as a costly alternate for technical high schools.

We can either have technical high schools or NCV's, we cannot sustain both.

Whatever routes remain - sustained and focussed attention needs to be given to ensure that all provision within feeder systems is of the highest standard. Introducing programs like FLC and FLP to cover for years and years or poor feeder system training is like trying to put a band aid plaster over a gunshot wound. Fix the source of the problem- don't make artisan training a solution to repair poor feeder systems!

4 Staffing of QCTO/DHET.

There is concern in some quarters that key posts within DHET/QCTO where decisions are made and concepts developed around artisan training are staffed by persons with limited understanding of artisan training and a primarily academic background.

Ensure key posts especially those where policy and concepts are formulated and developed are staffed by persons who have very good "on the ground" experience in artisan training. Where possible they should ideally be artisans themselves who have undergone an apprenticeship and a trade test.

5 Meaningful consultations between QCTO/DHET/NAMB to labour and key industry stakeholders.

Labour is excluded from key forums such as National Artisan Development Quality Assurance Committee (NADQAC) and there seems to be no interface into QCTO policy and decision making forums.

There is minimal labour representation at NAMF and it is generally felt that at forums such as NAMF and regional artisan development workshops and Road shows that the important decisions are already made.

Establish an advisory board to key decision making forums of QCTO /DHET and NAMB so that decisions and policy can be carefully considered and their real need ascertained before costly but fruitless expenditure is incurred or unrequired new policies and regulations developed.

Allow major SETA's to nominate key labour and industry reps to be part of an inclusive decision and policy making forum/ board with DHET/QCTO and NAMB around artisan training issues. Very critical decisions are being made in isolation of key stakeholders using the current decision making process.

Similarly Labour Unions have to actively participate and not be passive role players.

If it is an issue of capacity we appeal to the department and SETAs to build that capacity for labour to make meaningful contribution

6 Complicated ARPL process.

Labour notes that proposals around the new ARPL process will make it extremely complicated. It will prejudice members and lead to far more restricted access than it currently the case.

Relook at the current model used for example by the Merseta or CHIETA and adopt a simple system based on this.

The current/ old ARPL system was not perfect but its imperfections do not warrant the introduction of a highly complex system. Improve what we have.

Un-complicate the system.

7 Demise/ relegation of N courses.

Labour and employers are concerned about the future of the N courses.

These had many advantages such as part or full time release and clear alignment to trades.

They also allowed for upward progression and provided a means to our members through study to get N Diploma's and even the much acclaimed Government Certificate of competency.

We believe the N courses should continue in a modernised form in terms of subject content and subject names.

The trade theory subjects for example should remain and only need to be updated to the new occupational trade content.

The N courses were a good system- Do not do away with it, modernise it and retain it.

There is a major role for TVET's to play in artisan training in delivering N courses.

8 Occupational trades and curricula being overly structured.

Labour is in favour of the occupational qualifications not being overly and unnecessarily complicated with for example detailed curricula etc. This will kill the system and does not account for the reality of workplace learning which by its very nature is unstructured and dependant on customer demand and issues such as breakdowns and maintenance.

We note with grave concern the development of detailed curriculum statements which would guide at an overly prescriptive level the implementation and teaching of occupational trades.

We are in favour of one broad standard based on the QCTO /SAQA approved qualification documents. Development of detailed curriculum statements, overly prescriptive and unrealistic and cumbersome processes are not required.

Apprentices must be allowed to train within the parameters of the industry sector they are indentured into with the national goal being to pass a national trade test conducted to one standard.

This is the only standardisation needed.

9 Movement of trade testing in ideal situation to government trade test centres.

Labour and industry are of the view that level and fair playing fields need to be adopted in this regard. Documents have been seen which in a future context moot government trade test centre's as the ideal/ preferred provider which we reject.

Every centre should be accredited on merit and government centres should not have preference over others.

It must be remembered that we are training artisans for industry.

Ensure playing fields are level with regard to accreditation criteria and give all quality providers an equal chance. No discrimination.

10 NAMB /QCTO responsibilities.

It is been talked about that NAMB will be incorporated into the QCTO. Currently having them as separate bodies does not help.

If they are to be incorporated the sooner this is done the better.

11 Lack of stability and deviation from initial intended purpose of RPL as an example.

Labour realises that government is trying to improve the artisan training system and appreciates the efforts. However we have serious concerns that many of the suggested changes and new regulations do not improve it but complicate it and raise

Please try and minimise the changes being made to artisan training and trade testing.

Keep the system as simple as possible,
Consult properly and pilot before implementing new regulations and policy and critically ask if there is need for each change... "Is this REALLY needed?"

barriers towards our members becoming qualified artisans.

12 Sustainability of NAMB monitoring and moderation model.

The current model where NAMB uses providers to check on each other has potential compliance and integrity problems.

The model where SETA's undertook this did not have this and SETA ETQA reps were truly independent.

NAMB should work with functioning SETA's and partner together into the future.

In the future SETA or SETAB landscape there could still be a meaningful role to be played by SETA's in assisting with accreditation, monitoring and moderation activities. Good capacity had been built up in SETA'S to do this- do not let it go to waste.

13. RPL as a stand- alone intervention

This practice disadvantages the workers and it compromises the RPL system and its intended objectives

RPL should be applied as part of a qualification as contained in SAQA policies and guidelines.

We propose that implementation of every learning programme should begin with RPL if beneficiaries are adults or have work experience.

14 Trade test regulations

A concern is raised around Trade test Regulation and how RPL is applied where we find that it is demoralizing but also not what we expected as a labour movement

Fast track the implementation of Part Qualifications so that we can ensure the workers are accredited for what they know and can do

We propose the suspension of this practice until the matter is resolved

15. RPL and Language barrier

The majority of the beneficiaries and deserving workers for RPL are black workers, Africans in particular yet you have Mentors and Assessors who are either English or Afrikaans first language speakers with very few African language first speakers.

We propose an accelerated training of Assessors who are African language speakers

We propose the translation of learning material to African languages

16. Lack of support and cooperation from some employers

Employers play a very critical role in the success of RPL because of their upper hand in the whole power relations.

It is imperative that parties engage to see to the implementation and monitoring RPL as a political agenda aiming to address the imbalance of the past

The department and Employer Associations must be in the forefront of the advocacy and lobbying for the support of RPL in the workplace and everywhere.

There should be an audit on companies that offer Artisan training to make sure that they do focus on training of new entrants but choose to ignore their current workers

SETAs must put policies in place to enforce the practice

In closing, we want to applaud member companies which have been conducting RPL for their workers without any pressure but because they know it is the right thing to do.

We want to commend those SETAs that continue to push for RPL for the employed and unemployed and hope that their SSPs will improve where we will see that dark patch which is made up of black workers, at the end of the pyramid moving up.

We have seen the faster issuing of certificates and issuing of single cross sector trade certificate. For these positive achievements NAMB has to be congratulated. Keep up the good work. You know the issue of certificates is bitter taste...

We once more appreciate the initiative by the department on this conference and hope that we will continue to have this dialogue so that we can smoothen the processes, simplify the procedures and guidelines. Most importantly, we acknowledge your prerogative to run the department and guide the policies BUT please engage industry stakeholders to ascertain **what Industry want and how they want it** before you implement any policy.

DESPITE THE CHALLENGES, WE NOTE THE POSITIVES AND THE GOOD INTENTIONS AND WE BELIEVE THAT TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!