

## **NOT JUST FAST TRACKING QUALIFICATIONS: RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

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Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) boasts many benefits, the most obvious being the ability to fast track obtaining a qualification. Many people today have extensive experience in their field but not the qualifications behind their name to back that experience. RPL offers a solution for those eligible candidates.

According to Mark Orpen, Chief Executive Officer at The Institute of People Development (IPD), RPL not only helps in achieving qualifications, but is also an effective tool within the workplace to prove competency. This affords people the option of entering into a field that they have no qualifications or paperwork for, based on prior experience.

Other benefits of RPL include the ability to do a credit transfer from one qualification to another, the ability to prove designation at a professional body (such as the Marketing Association of South Africa – MASA), and saving time and money when used as a form of the personal development programme (PDP), to create a training plan that is targeted and, therefore, more cost and time effective. According to Orpen; “Proving your worth is what RPL is all about.”

An RPL advisor evaluates evidence and measures it against a quality standard. This standard is the benchmark and varies according to the requirements of each particular learning field and qualification therein. Orpen explains that there are pros and cons when it comes to the collection and assessment of evidence as; “an RPL assessment can be developed to evaluate current competence – but there are some competencies that are less easily assessed. People need to be taught to keep proof of their experience.” Once the available evidence has been collected the RPL advisor then indicates what has been achieved and will also highlight any gaps in the evidence that need to be filled.

Gaps found in the evidence may indicate gaps in competence and can be filled in various different ways. At times it will be through actual education or training programmes, other times it could simply be building on past experience. “The process of an RPL assessment allows people the ability to see what they already have and what they need to reach their goals... that’s the difference with this kind of assessment, it’s not about what you can’t do, it’s what you can do and then what to do to get the rest. It is true learning & development.”

Effective RPL programmes boast a highly effective delivery mechanism, crafted over many years, driven by much research. “Unlike many generic RPL processes out there, through The Institute of People Development, learners are not left without real guidance. For those who are deemed good RPL candidates the process will not be difficult, although it can, at times, be time consuming to collect all the necessary evidence. We offer a unique model with staggered face-to-face contact with a tutor, mentor and/or RPL advisor. This system aids and sustains learners who otherwise would potentially drop out of the process,” adds Orpen.

As transformative as RPL can be, it is important to note that not everyone is a good fit for the RPL process. “A good RPL candidate is self-motivated with a real understanding of why they want the qualification. Seventy percent of the evidence should be easy to obtain, so access to their present and past environment is key. They should also still be willing to learn through the process; it is a learning event;” Orpen advises.

According to South African Qualifications Authority all Professional Bodies must have a formal RPL process in place, to validate designations. Reportedly, MA(SA) became interested in designing their own RPL process, and approached IPD to develop a model on their behalf. Orpen explains; “Following the creating of this designation process, which runs through RPL, SAQA has audited MA(SA) twice and has declared this process Best Practice, noting Ma(SA) as the best RPL Designation provider. Behind the scenes, IPD continues to measure the success of the process, as the quality assurer.”

Recognition of Prior Learning clearly offers many options and benefits. Allowing applicants the opportunity to fast track their qualifications and enter into fields that their experience has deemed them worthy of. Through quality RPL processes, candidates are afforded a unique experience that will guide them through the process like no other, individually recommending how much gap training is needed. “The process should be unique to every individual with a moderator and assessment coordinator on board throughout,” concludes Orpen. “Verification is usually put in place to assure quality; as a result it is vital that it is carefully moderated, verified and quality assured – the candidate must know that they have justifiably proven that they deserve that qualification”.

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Boilerplate:

Founded in 1999, Workplace Skills Solutions t/a The Institute of People Development (IPD) strives to equip, prepare and certify practitioners to serve South Africa's skills development strategy and facilitate the transformation of education and training. Over the years, IPD has become the preferred people development partner to most state owned and private enterprises in Southern Africa. IPD has assisted over 500 public and private training providers across most sectors of the economy to achieve or maintain accreditation through consulting, training and providing published guidelines. For more information, please contact IPD at [trainingenquiries@peopledev.co.za](mailto:trainingenquiries@peopledev.co.za) on (011) 315 2913 or visit [www.peopledevelopment.co.za](http://www.peopledevelopment.co.za).

Mark Orpen is the Chief Executive Officer of The Institute of People Development (IPD). With an undying entrepreneurial drive, Orpen founded IPD in 1999. He holds National Diplomas in Marketing and Sales, Learning and Development and a National Higher Certificate in Occupationally-Directed Education, Training and Development Practices. Orpen is represented on the board of more than ten companies and has the skills necessary to execute his duties as CEO of IPD. With a keen desire for the acquisition of knowledge, he has also completed many training courses in Human Resource Development, Marketing, Corporate Governance, Maritime Studies and Commercial Property Investments. Orpen can be contacted at [mark.orpen@peopledev.co.za](mailto:mark.orpen@peopledev.co.za).