



# RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER POLICY

## OF THE BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

<b>REFERENCE NUMBER</b>	AD001
<b>ACCOUNTABLE EXECUTIVE MANAGERS</b>	Principal and Registrar
<b>POLICY OWNER</b>	Registrar
<b>RESPONSIBLE DIVISION</b>	Administration
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<b>KEY STAKEHOLDERS</b>	Students

### SIGNATURES OF ACCEPTANCE

Policy Owner

Accountable Executive Manager

Board Representative

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 1. PREAMBLE

- a. The Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa (BTC) was established in 1951 to prepare pastors for the ministry of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Since then its scope has widened to include the preparation of congregational ministers, youth workers, and missionaries, in and beyond Southern Africa. It is now open to all who are prepared to accept its *Statement of Faith*.
- b. BTC is registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), and its programmes are registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). BTC's assessment and moderation practices seek to fulfil all requirements made by these statutory bodies as it is committed to offering its students a quality, trustworthy, and accredited theological education.
- c. BTC supports the view that Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) are important mechanisms for the transformation of access to higher educational institutions in South Africa.
- d. Through its RPL and CAT processes, BTC aims to contribute towards increasing the participation of persons with relevant prior learning and work experience in the post-school education and training system.
- e. These processes will particularly broaden access to higher education for students from previously disadvantaged communities who have not had access to quality education.
- f. This policy clearly defines the principles and parameters for conducting these processes in relation to BTC qualifications in support of the CHE's principles of equity, access, inclusivity and redress of past unfair discrimination with regard to educational opportunities.

## 2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

- a. The purpose of this policy is to support the Teaching and Learning strategy of BTC in ensuring that RPL and CAT practices adhere to national statutory requirements and internal quality criteria for effective theological education in the higher education sector.
- b. All RPL considerations must adhere to this policy and be conducted in accordance with the general academic rules of the College.
- c. The policy will ensure that processes relating to RPL and CAT are aligned with and adhere to prescripts in relevant legislative and national policies and guidelines, including, but not limited to:
  - i. Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide (CHE, 2014);
  - ii. Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2014);

- iii. National Policy and Criteria for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications; and
  - iv. Professional Designations in South Africa (SAQA, 2015);
  - v. Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in Higher Education (CHE, 2016); and
  - vi. Work-Integrated Learning: Good Practice Guide (CHE, 2011).
- d. This policy applies to the following qualifications:
- i. Higher Certificate in Ministry (120 credits; NQF level 5)
  - ii. Higher Certificate in Theology (120 credits; NQF level 5)
  - iii. Bachelor of Biblical Studies (360 credits; NQF level 7)
  - iv. Bachelor of Theology (480 credits; NQF level 8) (Phasing out from 2022)
  - v. Bachelor of Theology (Honours) (120 credits; NQF level 8) (Currently under application)
  - vi. Master of Theology (180 credits; NQF level 9)
- e. This policy should be read in conjunction with BTC's:
- i. *Teaching and Learning Policy*
  - ii. *Assessment and Evaluation Policy*
  - iii. *Student Admissions Policy*
  - iv. *Work-Integrated Learning Policy*
  - v. *Postgraduate Research Policy*

### 3. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

- a. Admissions Committee: The Admissions Committee is comprised of the, Registrar, Principal, members of Senior Faculty, and the Academic Programme Administrator.
- b. Articulation: "Articulation in higher education refers to the mechanisms that enable student mobility between and among higher education institutions. Articulation has 'horizontal' aspects dealing with courses and programmes at a given level of learning, and 'vertical' aspects, dealing with courses and programmes at different levels" (CHE 2016).
- c. Assessment: "Assessment refers to the systematic evaluation of a student's ability to demonstrate the achievement of the learning goals intended in a curriculum" (CHE 2016).
- d. Assessment Criteria: "The standards used to guide learning and to assess learner achievement and/or to evaluate and certify competence" (SAQA 2014).
- e. Credit: "One credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning" (SAQA 2014).
- f. Credit Accumulation: "Credit accumulation is the totalling of credits towards the completion of a qualification" (CHE 2016:10)

- g. Credit Accumulation and Transfer: “Credit accumulation and transfer 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” (CHE 2016).
- h. Credit Transfer: “Credit transfer means carrying over credits either horizontally at the same level of study or vertically from a lower to a higher level of study. Horizontal transfer refers to credits at the same level carried over between institutions where the outcome / curriculum statements (subject content) are identical or comparable. Vertical transfer is where credits of a preceding level of study at one institution are accepted for entry into the next level of study at another institution” (CHE 2016).
- i. Formal Learning: “Learning that occurs in an organised and structured education and training environment and that is explicitly designated as such” (SAQA 2014).
- j. Informal Learning: “Learning that results from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community life, or leisure” (SAQA 2014).
- k. Lifelong Learning: “Learning that takes place in all contexts in life - formally, non-formally and informally. It includes learning behaviours and obtaining knowledge; understanding; attitudes; values and competencies for personal growth, social and economic well-being, democratic citizenship, cultural identity and employability” (SAQA 2014).
- l. Non-Formal Learning: “Planned learning activities, not explicitly designated as learning, towards the achievement of a qualification or part-qualification; often associated with learning that results in improved workplace practice” (SAQA 2014).
- m. Recognition of Prior Learning: “Recognition of Prior Learning 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 rigorously assessed and moderated for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition, or further learning and development” (CHE 2016).

#### **4. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING**

##### **4.1. Prescripts for RPL**

- a. RPL is only applicable to informal and non-formal learning.
- b. RPL may be used to grant access to, or exemption from courses that contribute towards a particular qualification. BTC recognises certain forms of prior learning as equivalent to the prescribed formal minimum admission requirements, and may recognise other forms of prior learning for granting advanced standing in

particular programmes through exemption from modules or courses at lower levels of the qualification programme.

- c. Keeping with standard acceptable practice in higher education, exemption from courses does not translate to credits being awarded for those courses.
- d. A student who, on the basis of RPL, is granted exemption from doing some courses in a qualification programme will complete the qualification with a total number of credits that is less than the normally required number of credits for the qualification in question. RPL creates such an exception, and the student concerned will not be compelled to do more courses to make up for the difference in the total number of credits.
- e. The actual number of credits earned while studying at BTC will be reflected on the student's transcript in addition to a note of all exemptions granted.
- f. Full qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) cannot be awarded solely on the basis of RPL. Similarly, exemption based on RPL will be limited to not more than 50% of the courses of the qualification programme in question.
- g. Not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a higher education programme will be admitted through an RPL process (CHE 2016:1).
- h. "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 2016:7).

#### 4.2. Implementation of RPL

- a. RPL can be applied for by students prior to the commencement of their studies. Applications should be made using the designated form.
- b. RPL exemption is only granted on the basis of informal or non-formal learning. Formal learning may only be considered in a CAT application.
- c. RPL applications are evaluated by the Admissions Committee whose decisions are recorded by the Registrar. The Registrar will communicate the outcome of an RPL application to the student.
- d. The decision of the Admissions Committee is final.
- e. Approval of applications will only be granted for prior learning and experience that is directly relevant to the outcomes of the qualification, programme or

course. However, the maintenance of academic standards shall not result in the artificial maintenance of standards based on false premises.

## **5. CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER**

### **5.1. Prescripts for CAT**

- a. The process of CAT brings together the diverse features of credit accumulation and credit transfer in order to facilitate lifelong learning.
- b. CAT allows a student's achievements to be recognised even if the student does not achieve a qualification. Any or 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.
- c. 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.
- d. "The recognition of credits for the purposes of transfer from one qualification to another will be determined by the nature of the qualifications, the relationship between them, the nature, complexity, and extent of the curricula associated with the specific subjects to be recognised for exemption and/or inclusion, and the nature of the assessment used.
- e. 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.
- f. A maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification. This practice seeks to protect the integrity of qualifications by ensuring that the exception does not become the norm.
- g. Credits obtained from studies that do not lead to full qualification (for example, non-degree studies) may count for credit accumulation (CHE 2016:2).
- h. Short courses offered outside the HEQSF are non-credit bearing and, thus, individuals who register for and attend such short courses are not awarded credits against any level on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). This means no credit will be accumulated and/or transferred from such short courses. However, the learning acquired may count for RPL.

### **5.2. Implementation of CAT**

- a. The Admissions Committee will ensure that the same set of credits cannot be transferred to more than one qualification within an institution, and that credits are not duplicated.

- b. CAT can be applied for by students prior to the commencement of their studies. Applications should be made using the designated form.
- c. CAT is only granted on the basis of formal learning. Informal and non-formal learning may only be considered in a RPL application.
- d. CAT applications are evaluated by the Admissions Committee whose decisions are recorded by the Registrar. The Registrar will communicate the outcome of an CAT application to the student.
- e. Should a student object to the decision of the Admissions Committee, they may make an appeal using the grievance procedures.

## **6. PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RPL AND CAT**

- a. The implementation of RPL and CAT will be guided by the following principles which build upon the foundational principles of validity, reliability, efficiency and effectiveness.

### **6.1. Evidence-Based Evaluation**

- a. The evaluation of applications shall be based on evidence that is directly related to the specifications in the learning outcomes, course, programme or qualification for which recognition is sought.
- b. Applicants shall not unfairly benefit from RPL or CAT practices, and should meet the same requirements that are met by students completing the course, programme or qualification through the regular BTC enrolment process.

### **6.2. Transparency in Communication**

- a. The requirements and conditions for the approval of RPL and CAT must be clearly communicated to students in official documents. Explanations to enable students to prepare the documents that will enable them to meet the requirements should be made available.

### **6.3. Valid and Reliable Evaluation of Applications**

- a. The evaluation of evidence submitted by applicants for RPL or CAT must be done through valid and reliable processes so that judgements on the applications are justifiable.
- b. The assessment and evaluation of the evidence provided by applicants must be done against predetermined outcomes, criteria and other specifications that must be derived from the course or qualification to which the application relates.

### **6.4. Promoting the Interest of the Applicant**

- a. The applicant's interest shall be promoted during RPL and CAT processes to ensure that an applicant is not disadvantaged to the benefit of BTC, recognising



that an applicant may be disadvantaged through awarding too little recognition or excessive recognition.

- b. BTC will endeavour to achieve inclusion and to overcome barriers to access and success in higher education to applicants who do not meet formal prerequisites. Applications will be treated on a case-by-case basis.

#### 6.5. Equal Treatment of Applicants

- a. All applicants shall be treated equally and there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, gender, denomination or background.
- b. All applications shall be evaluated with the same rigour to ensure consistency and fairness, confirming that any such approval would have equally been granted to any other applicant.
- c. BTC shall be particularly aware of the needs of students from historically disadvantaged communities to access quality learning opportunities.

#### 6.6. Penalties for False Claims

- a. In the event of any false declaration or any dishonesty by an applicant in any part of the RPL or CAT process, the entire process shall be deemed null and void.
- b. BTC may decide not to accept any future application for RPL or CAT from the same applicant, and further disciplinary action may be taken.

#### 6.7. A Standardised, Well-Managed and Cost-Effective Process

- a. All applicants must follow the RPL or CAT process as published in the College Prospectus and no deviations or exceptions shall be accepted to the stipulated process.
- b. It shall neither be the intention nor purpose of the RPL and CAT processes to be a means of significant revenue for the College; as such, the processes shall be well managed and structured to achieve its set goals through stream-lined and cost-effective processes.

### **7. PROCEDURE FOR RPL AND CAT**

- a. The applications, processing and approval for RPL and CAT shall follow the same procedure, with difference indicated, where applicable.

#### 7.1. Eligibility

- a. The following persons are eligible for RPL:
  - i. Students who do not meet the minimum entry requirements for a qualification, but have a stipulated number of years of work experience.

- ii. Students over the age of 23 without a matric certificate who have at least two years' work experience in an area related to the field of study.
  - iii. Students with a National Senior Certificate, Senior Certificate or National Vocational Certificate who do not meet the English language entry requirement into a qualification will be advised on completing supplementary programmes before being granted admission to the Higher Certificates.
- b. The following persons are eligible for CAT:
- i. Students who have accumulated credits for credit-bearing programmes or for incomplete qualifications at accredited institutions can apply for exemption for the courses for which credits have been awarded.

### 7.2. Applications for RPL and CAT

- a. All applications shall be made to the Registrar using the prescribed RPL or CAT Application Form.
- b. Applicants will submit the completed Application Forms with the stipulated application fee together with evidence relating to their application, which could include: certified copies of qualifications, certificates for credit-bearing programmes, transcripts of previous formal studies, and/or detailed description of additional learning and experience.
- c. Submitted applications will be checked for completeness by the to ensure that all relevant information and documents have been submitted and that the application fee has been paid. The Registrar will request applicants to submit additional documents, where relevant.
- d. The applications are then submitted to the Admissions Committee, consisting of the Registrar, Programme Coordinators and Academic Programme Administrator for the official evaluation of the applications.

### 7.3. Evaluation of the Application for RPL

- a. The Admissions Committee will convene at set dated to evaluate the applications, which shall include:
  - i. Confirming the validity of the evidence and the claim for RPL or CAT;
  - ii. Confirming the authenticity of all submissions, especially certified copies of official records;
  - iii. Confirming that the evidence reflects the current competence of the applicant;
  - iv. Confirming that the evidence is sufficient in relation to the requirements; and
  - v. Determining any additional evidence required, where relevant.
- b. The Committee could enlist the assistance of external institutions such as SAQA for the evaluation of evidence of programmes completed outside South Africa.
- c. The Committee could enlist the assistance of a subject matter expert to evaluate the validity or relevance of the evidence.

- d. The Committee's decisions will be minuted and forwarded to the Registrar for communication to the applicants.
- e. The Committee may request the applicant to meet with the Committee to clarify issues around the evidence submitted; or
- f. Request the applicant to submit additional evidence, in which case applicants should be provided with guidelines on producing the required evidence.

#### 7.4. Submission of Additional Evidence

- a. Should the Admissions Committee request the applicant to provide additional information, it could be in the form of:
  - i. Written responses or other documents relating on specific areas requested by the Committee;
  - ii. Demonstration of skills to provide evidence of having mastered the specified outcome, e.g. in preaching;
  - iii. Oral assessment, e.g. that requires the applicant to verbally explain information provided in the portfolio of evidence;
  - iv. Testimonials and recommendations from reputable or respected persons who would be able to confirm the applicant's involvement in activities, abilities, understanding or knowledge;
  - v. Specified projects that the applicant would be required to complete and submit as additional evidence;
  - vi. Portfolio of evidence consisting of document and/or other evidence (such as photos or audio-visual material) confirming that the applicant has satisfactorily attained the relevant outcomes.

#### 7.5. Decision on the Application

- a. On completion of the evaluation of the application, the Committee's final decisions shall be recorded in a minute of Committee meetings. The Committee shall ensure that the decision aligns with national policy prescripts of the CHE as reflected in this policy, as well as SAQA requirements relating to the awarding and recording of credits, where applicable.
- b. The Registrar will communicate the decision to the applicant.
- c. Should the application be approved, the Registrar shall give formal effect to the decision, either by recording the prior learning recognised or the transfer of the credits against the student's name in accordance with the standard BTC procedure.
- d. Should the application not be approved, the applicant shall be informed of the right to appeal the decision.
- e. Copies of all documents relating to RPL and CAT applications shall be recorded in individual applicant files and securely stored.

## **8. RESPONSIBILITY FOR RPL AND CAT**

- a. The College Principal shall:
  - i. Ensure that the BTC staff have the required competence to implement RPL and CAT processes;
  - ii. Approve the fees payable for applications for RPL and CAT; and
  - iii. In consultation with the Registrar, process appeals lodged against decisions made by the Admissions Committee.
  
- b. The Registrar shall:
  - i. Bear overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy;
  - ii. Establish and maintain effective administrative processes for processing applications for RPL and CAT;
  - iii. Nominate academic staff to provide guidance to applicants on collecting or producing appropriate evidence for their applications for RPL or CAT;
  - iv. Provide training for staff to have the required competence to implement RPL and CAT processes;
  - v. Serve on and communicate the decisions of the Admissions Committee to the applicants;
  - vi. Oversee the correct recording and secure storage of all documents relating the applications for RPL and CAT; and
  - vii. Quality assure the implementation of processes relating to RPL and CAT.
  
- c. The Admissions Committee shall:
  - i. Evaluate applications for RPL and CAT fairly and consistently and minute decisions according to standard BTC procedures;
  - ii. Maintain the confidentiality in relation to decisions on applications for RPL and CAT; and
  - iii. Enlist the assistance of official institutions or subject experts, where necessary, to guide to Committee in making correct decisions.
  
- d. The applicants shall:
  - i. Submit applications in accordance with the prescribed procedures;
  - ii. Pay the fee for applications;
  - iii. Submit evidence that is valid, authentic, current and sufficient with their applications;
  - iv. Refrain from making false declarations of dishonesty in any information or documents submitted during the application process.