

SACAP catapults transformation through RPL programme

 By [Yashaen Luckan](#)

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The South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP) is about to unveil an online platform that will launch its Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme, a key transformation driver of the fourth term council's plan that aims to realise economic redress within the profession and the broader built environment.



The architectural profession has been plagued by a lack of representivity albeit some 23 years into democracy. The general focus of public institutions, including universities, has been on recruiting more students from the historically disadvantaged communities – a pipeline approach. Given the historic disparity in schooling, related to socio-economic challenges faced by these students, curricula and resources have not adequately adapted to this reality.

It takes a minimum of six years to graduate as candidate architect while a real consideration of the socio-economic realities of a changed student body has not been forthcoming; this has greatly stifled transformation.

Drop-out rate of black students

Institutions of higher learning are generally ill-equipped as their resources, infrastructural and human alike, cannot support students in need in order to succeed through a long period of study towards an architectural qualification. The drop-out rate of black students is of serious concern – one has to look at a sample study of the demographic representation among first year students in comparison to the final year students, which reveals a bleak picture.

On the other hand, those few students that do manage to progress will only qualify as architects after a minimum period of eight years, including a candidacy period and board exam. This implies that, in any event, the pipeline approach may realise a result after a period of eight years with little impact on transformation statistics, due to the drop-out rate mentioned above.

While SACAP engages with the heads of schools via its education committee to find ways of expediting transformation, it has also acknowledged a critical mass of practitioners, predominantly from historically disadvantaged communities, who have no means of professional articulation other than giving up their employment for full-time studies. These are people who have acquired knowledge and skills informally through work experience.

An alternate and legitimate route

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an alternate and legitimate route to professional qualification for these practitioners without them having to give up their full-time employment. As the RPL programme would typically take between six months and two years to award a professional qualification, transformation will be realised in much quicker time than the pipeline approach of formal studies.

It must be noted that prior to the Architectural Professions Act (Act 44 of 2000) only professional architects were recognised and thereby eligible for professional registration. Subsequently, it changed to include other categories of registration for those persons with ability and / or qualifications at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels lower than that of the professional architect.

The greatest beneficiary of this change would be society at large, especially those historically marginalised communities who had historically been served by lower skilled, unregistered practitioners who were not bound by any code of ethics or conduct. RPL will therefore fundamentally impact on the spatial transformation of these communities, in a vital way.

As the architectural professionals' regulatory body, SACAP's strategic plan and objectives are aligned with the imperatives of the National Development Plan (NDP) and the roll-out of its cutting edge large scale infrastructure projects.

Matching skills to opportunity

Architectural professionals ignite the planning process of projects such as those undertaken by the Department of Public Works. This has further fuelled the urgency of implementation of RPL in order to allow the historically marginalised professionals an opportunity to contribute to nation building, while developing themselves further. This is the essence of redress – matching skills to opportunity.

The purpose of RPL is to assess previously acquired skills and knowledge, with the view to providing an opportunity for applicants to articulate to the next level of professional registration. It is expected that there will be a large number of applicants and therefore SACAP developed an online system for application and part-evaluation. More recently there has been an intense period of testing newly designed RPL software.

The programme has been designed as a two-phase process. The first phase happens online and allows for self-assessment. The outcome of this assessment determines whether the user can progress to the second phase, which includes the applicant being invited to present their work evidenced in the self-assessment phase, for review by an assessment panel.

Access to virtual library

For those professionals who need to first supplement their knowledge in order to demonstrate readiness to present to the assessment panel, SACAP is ensuring that a virtual library will be available. This library will be made available through SACAP's partnership with the architectural learning sites (ALSSs) and voluntary associations (VAs) that are validated by it.

This is envisaged to include access to online journals, dissertations and material from Professional Practice Examinations (PPEs) and previous Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses. SACAP is now pleased to announce that the programme will be available, in a new format, for the benefit of three of its registration categories: Draughtspersons, Architectural Technologists and Senior Architectural Technologists.

Through its research, SACAP estimates that, initially, 500-plus professionals across the country, commonly referred to as 'the Missing Middle', need access to equal opportunity and practical redress for past imbalances and are eager to take their first steps on SACAP's innovative RPL online platform. Each will have to demonstrate project work from the last three to five years, depending on their registration category.

SACAP is proud to launch RPL to advance human potentialities in the interest of redress, transformation and nation building.

ABOUT YASHAEN LUCKAN

Yashaen Luckan is the president of the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP). A registered practising architect himself, he is also an academic at the School of Architecture, Planning and Housing at University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN). As an academic and professional in the field, he continuously studies the profession in order to evaluate the role and impact of architectural studies and practice to the broader society.

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