Implications of variance in ARPL policy: A South African case study

B. L. Frick
Centre for Higher and Adult Education
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch, South Africa
e-mail: blf@sun.ac.za

E. M. Bitzer
Department of Curriculum Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Stellenbosch
Stellenbosch, South Africa
e-mail: emb2@sun.ac.za

B. L. Leibowitz
Centre for Teaching and Learning
Stellenbosch University
Stellenbosch, South Africa
e-mail: bleibowitz@sun.ac.za

Abstract
The Assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning (ARPL) has received much attention lately in South African higher education. It has been argued that many institutions have been slow to adapt to ARPL philosophies, policies and practices. This article reports on an institutional case study of ARPL policy at one South African university. An analysis of ARPL policy at both the institutional and faculty levels points to variance in terms of agreed-upon criteria. The nature of and implications this variance holds for ARPL practice are explored in the second part of the article. Specific issues of variance related to the conceptualisation and purpose of ARPL and shared ARPL processes are discussed in greater depth. An analysis of policies at the institution can be used as a starting point to devise an educational support system for ARPL at institutions wishing to implement ARPL.

INTRODUCTION
The assessment and recognition of prior learning (ARPL) has gained much prominence at national and institutional levels in South Africa during the past decade (Kistan
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2002; Van Rooy 2002; Castle and Atwood 2001; Cretchley and Castle 2001). ARPL can be defined as the comparison of previous learning and experience of a learner obtained in whichever way, against the required learning outcomes specified for a specific qualification, and the acceptance of that which meets the requirements for the purposes of qualification (Kistan 2002; SAQA 1997). The aspects of equity and redress differentiate ARPL in South Africa from similar initiatives in other countries (SAQA 2004) and it can therefore not be considered a politically neutral process within this context (Castle and Atwood 2001; Cretchley and Castle 2001; Osman and Castle 2004; Van Rooy, 2002). The conceptualisation of ARPL within a specific context will thus influence policy development and determine the purposes for which ARPL is used. For the purposes of this article, ARPL is defined as an assessment strategy that enables all role players in the ARPL process (at institutional, programme, facilitation and learner levels) to negotiate the value and significance of prior learning (formal, non-formal, or informal) for further study in the formal higher education sector. The article will mainly focus on the application of the ARPL concept at the postgraduate level.

A study was undertaken at a South African university in order to provide teaching and learning support to the institution. The context of this study can be described as a historically white university with a focus on the development of research capacity, and which does not draw many part-time students. The vision statement of the specific university refers to diversity, but does not have a strong focus on mature or part-time students. The institution does not have a strong history of ARPL, although the extent of practice varies across faculties. An important aim of the study was to analyse and compare the various available ARPL policy documents at institutional and faculty levels at one South African university in order to identify elements of good practice in policy formulation. Ball (1997) stresses the importance of policy analysis research as it places educational principles and practices within the greater education context of the time. Educational practice and reform cannot be separated from educational policy, since to fully understand education, one needs to grasp the policy underlying the practice and proposed reform. A second motivating factor was the intention to develop a model of support by the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) of the university for faculties wishing to implement ARPL. It was felt that an analysis of the existing policies would provide a sound basis for starting to develop such a model. The study was partly motivated by the relative novelty of ARPL at the specific university (the institutional ARPL policy was approved by the University Senate in June 2004) in order to guide future policy development. The general focus of ARPL at the university is mainly on the postgraduate level. This was seen as a good starting point as the institution lacks an embedded history of ARPL. The focus on postgraduate ARPL is also motivated by the commitment of the specific university to research excellence, as well as to access.

The study furthermore formed part of a wider process of self-evaluation and quality assurance at the university in question. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA 2004) recommends an audit procedure to determine which actions are necessary
to attain a holistic ARPL model, to stimulate reflection that informs strategic planning, and to provide information for ARPL evaluation and research. In this particular case, the guidelines for policy development supplied by the Division for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance (Adams 2005) of the specific university as well as those provided by SAQA (2004) were used to analyse the institutional and faculty ARPL policies.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The literature on ARPL provides insight into a variety of issues that need to be considered when developing and implementing policy. The following issues are highlighted in literature: ARPL conceptualisation, purposes and processes, assessment, support, monitoring and record keeping, as well as costs involved in ARPL. A discussion of these issues provides a theoretical basis for the ensuing discussion and structure on which the rest of the article is built.

The implementation of ARPL takes on different forms, according to varying purposes of ARPL – varying between access and credit. Castle and Atwood (2001) argue the advantages of following the ARPL for access only route, which recognises the individual’s personal and intellectual potential, but does not assume the learner’s knowledge, skills and/or experience to be equivalent to that gained through formal education. However, approaches to ARPL that merely focus on access, often do not pay attention to what happens after access (post-entry). Castle and Atwood (2001) stress the importance of post-entry experience – with the aim of deepening and extending prior knowledge. ARPL for credit has advantages, such as giving learners negotiating power, but Van Rooy (2002) and Osman and Castle (2004) warn that it removes learners from the learning experience itself. ARPL for credit would, in addition, suggest predetermined and static curricula. Learning then becomes a product rather than a process. ARPL for credit transfer requires inter-institutional agreements on evaluation standards, as well as a national system of credit transfer between higher education institutions and other providers. Credit transfer may therefore be difficult to achieve, but will generate closer networks between the community, industry, employers, professional bodies, labour and other educational institutions (Van Rooy 2002; Osman and Castle, 2004). These positions on the conceptualisation, purposes and processes of ARPL impact on policy formulation, especially in terms of assessment procedures.

The assessment of prior learning (in all its different forms) appears to be a complex process. Assessment in ARPL appears to be closely related to the context in which prior learning has occurred. Harris (2000) calls for assessment that focuses on illuminating performance, rather than measuring it. The SAQA guidelines for ARPL implementation (2004) emphasise stringent ARPL assessment, but at the same time demand that ARPL assessments should not be more stringent than the assessment of learners in full-time programmes.

Osman and Castle (2002) argue that ARPL as a mere policy without real academic and administrative consistency will not realise its true potential. An institutional culture
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that incorporates ARPL, consciously implements applicant-friendly ARPL policies and is supported by informed and committed personnel that treats applicants in a professional manner, is cited as a support factor that influences the successful implementation of ARPL (Osman and Castle 2002).

ARPL is a labour-intensive endeavour that has personnel implications for both the administrative and academic levels of higher education. Osman and Castle (2004) argue that trained ARPL support personnel are more sensitive to the particular needs of ARPL applicants. However, with limited human resources it is often difficult to appoint separate entities within the ARPL system (including administrators, facilitators, moderators and assessors). According to SAQA (2004) guidelines, personnel should not only be aware, but should form an integral part of the ARPL processes and procedures. In a university setting, lecturers are usually required to facilitate and assess during the ARPL process. Role clarity in policy, and practical suggestions on how these different roles can be interpreted, can enhance policy implementation. Clarity on how services rendered will be acknowledged can motivate personnel to adopt ARPL in their teaching and learning practices.

Castle and Atwood (2001) call for the incorporation of ARPL in a systemic and focused way as part of the higher education quality assurance system, which requires a substantial and long-term commitment from all ARPL role players. ARPL services will only be credible if they meet stringent quality assurance measures. Moderation and record keeping are important components of quality management in ARPL and therefore a lack of record keeping at the institutional level makes it extremely difficult to justify actions taken to implement ARPL to higher authorities. At the faculty level, record keeping ensures faculty level accountability in relation to the processes of quality assurance, equity, diversity and redress. Record keeping could also facilitate post-entry support of ARPL learners within the faculty. The tracking of learners’ progress forms part of academic monitoring, student supervision and mentoring, and eventually student throughput (SAQA 2004).

Van Rooy (2002) found ARPL start-up costs, the costs of ARPL services, and the operating costs of introducing and conducting ARPL to be relatively high in comparison to the mainstream expenditure per learner. There is the issue of lost revenue if the learner is exempted from certain modules. Furthermore, the process of ARPL assessment is time-consuming and may divert personnel attention from the relatively well-paying mainstream education (Taylor and Clemans 2000; Van Rooy 2002). Taylor and Clemans (2000) recommend that an assessment fee be charged. SAQA (2004), however, warns that fees charged for the delivery and administration of assessment and ARPL services should not create barriers to ARPL candidates.

Kistan (2002) maintains that ARPL is both an official policy imperative and the imposition of an administrative dilemma. ARPL can be seen as a catalyst for change, but it also poses challenges at management level as it has implications for the mission, admission policy, programmes, curriculum, and mode of delivery, time-table, assessment
procedures, staffing and the learning environment at any higher education institution (Osman and Castle 2004). Institutions that are able to implement ARPL effectively appear to follow a learner-centred approach that is inclusive, supportive and respectful of difference and personal preference (Osman and Castle 2004).

**METHODOLOGY**

The analysis presented here is descriptive in nature. The focus of the policy analysis in this case thus falls on the conceptualisation, formulation and design of ARPL policies, not their actual implementation and impact. Data sources in this investigation involved all ARPL policy documents, including the institutional policy and faculty policies from eight of the ten faculties at the university where the study was undertaken. Two faculties did not yet have completed ARPL policies at the time of the study.

Ball (1994, 18) describes policies as ‘textual interventions in practice’ that ‘pose problems to subjects that must be solved in context’. Texts, such as policy documents, tend to be abstract and the products of a variety of influences and agendas. As the analyst ultimately produces the interpretation, the empirical analysis of policy texts needs to support the descriptive analysis. The analysis of policy texts and related documents helps the researcher to uncover incoherence and contradiction in texts (Ball 1994). Analysis also serves to indicate who is advantaged and disadvantaged by the specific policy (Gale 2001). Policies are created within systems of power, values and practices, and filter who or what is perceived as meaningful and authoritative. As such, policies can change and limit how we think about issues.

The approach to policy analysis as described by Taylor (1997) and Gale (2001) was used to analyse the ARPL policies of the specific university. This approach enables the analyst to analyse policy at the micro-level (faculty policies) and to link this to an understanding of the context at the macro-level (institutional policy). Ball (1994) supports the use of investigations that link the micro- and macro-aspects of policies.

The study took on the form of an institutional case study. Tellis (1997) describes a case study as the ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed. The collective case study approach (Tellis 1997) is followed where a group of cases – all ARPL policies at institutional and faculty level – are studied in considerable depth by means of content analysis. The unit of analysis was therefore ARPL policy at the university. The use of documentation such as policy documents is viewed as a valid source of evidence, as it forms a stable, unobtrusive and exact form of information that gives broad coverage to the studied issue. Policy documents were obtained from the institution’s academic planning and quality assurance division. The currency of these documents was corroborated with the relevant faculty officers responsible for ARPL. Reliability was achieved through developing a case study protocol.

Data analysis consisted of examining, categorising, tabulating, or recombining evidence that addressed the focus of the study, namely to investigate, analyse and compare the various available ARPL policy documents at institutional and faculty levels. The
analysis led to the identification of elements of good practice in policy formulation (Yin 1994). The SAQA criteria and guidelines for the implementation of the recognition of prior learning (2004) and institutional ARPL documentation supplied by the division of academic planning and quality assurance at the institution (correspondence with officer from Division for Academic Planning and Quality Assurance) were used to compile a list of policy elements according to which the institutional and eight submitted faculty policies on ARPL were analysed. The following policy elements were analysed and compared:

- the conceptualisation of ARPL
- the purposes of ARPL
- shared ARPL processes
- ARPL assessment strategies
- available ARPL support
- ARPL monitoring and record keeping
- ARPL cost recovery.

The main research questions addressed in the analysis of ARPL policy at the institution were therefore:

- To what extent do institutional and faculty policies conform to the agreed-upon ARPL criteria?
- What are the implications of policy variance from these criteria?

DISCUSSION

The Senate of the university in question commissioned the development of an institutional ARPL policy, which took place over a two-year period. The policy was accepted in June 2004. The university now delegates the responsibility for its institutional ARPL policy implementation to the different faculties and states that the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) should support lecturers wishing to implement ARPL. Faculties drafted faculty-specific policies for the implementation of ARPL. The majority of the faculties (eight out of the possible ten) had completed this process at the time of the study. ARPL is a relatively new process within the specific university, even though ARPL had been practised on an ad hoc basis for some time in a number of faculties.

Conceptualisation of ARPL

According to SAQA (2004) and its promotion of a transformative approach, higher education institutions are required to incorporate ARPL in their strategic plans and their institutional policies. As far as the concept of ARPL is concerned, it appears that the institutional focus is more obviously directed at core activities like teaching and learning than at important issues such as inclusion and adult learning, which might
not be considered crucial by those not strongly motivated by the need for social transformation. As pointed out by several authors (Breier 2001; Castle and Atwood 2001; Cretchley and Castle 2001; Osman and Castle 2004; Van Rooy 2002), ARPL often tends to be instrumental rather than to address equity and redress, even though the specific university does describe the ARPL policy as part of an institutional vision to create a campus culture embracing diversity and contributing to societal development within a research-oriented scholarly environment.

From the analysis of the institutional ARPL policy at the specific university it is clear that an institutional policy was produced as part of its quality assurance procedures. The university adheres to national requirements (SAQA 2004) and the institutional ARPL policy (University 2004, 2) emphasises that its adoption of ARPL is ‘. . . not based on pressure from the government or other institutions, but on the University’s conviction that it is essential to respond in fair, practical ways to the requests of individuals . . . and interested groups for recognition of prior learning . . .’.

The institutional policy provides the framework within which faculties can conceptualise their own contextualised policies. An analysis of faculty policies indicates the importance of faculty-specific conceptualisations of ARPL. The conceptualisation of ARPL may even differ at the departmental level, which is evident in a number of the ARPL faculty policies. Some faculties stress the importance of relevant stakeholders.

Purpose of ARPL

The primary purpose of ARPL at the specific university – as described in the institutional policy – is access. This corresponds to the findings of Breier (2001) that most South African institutions of higher education provide ARPL for access rather than for credits or qualifications. It is therefore mostly a pre-entrance mechanism rather than an active in-course progress (post-entry) mechanism. The purpose of ARPL is not standardised across faculty policies, as both ARPL for access and/or credit are noted. None of the faculty policies refer to inter-institutional agreements for awarding credit. In the faculty policies where ARPL with placement, accelerated status, and crediting are mentioned, the implementation plans for practice are not explicitly stated. ARPL is a relatively new phenomenon in the majority of the faculties. The variation in specificity could result from the fact that some environments have more experience with requests for ARPL than others. It is much easier to formulate policy from an experienced stance, and it was therefore expected that some faculties would have had more access to detailed information available in this regard.

Shared ARPL processes

The specific university has taken a strategic decision to position itself as a research-oriented institution and therefore the initial focus of ARPL is at the postgraduate level. The institutional policy substantiates this decision by stating: ‘Postgraduate access and pass requirements differ significantly from programme to programme, are directed
specifically at proven research competence, and are therefore more easily accommodated by the uniqueness of academic environments . . . [the university] therefore accepts that ARPL at this University will be given priority at the postgraduate level, rather than at the undergraduate level.’ Faculty policies, however, indicate that at least four faculties have a need for articulation of ARPL at the undergraduate level as well. The flexibility offered by faculty-specific policies (in contrast to an institutional policy only) is therefore evident.

The faculty policies differ with regard to the processes and approaches toward ARPL. The approach to the ARPL process followed in three of the faculties relates to the developmental model of ARPL presented by Osman and Castle (2004). The developmental model requires of the learner to extract and articulate learning from experience in a format closely related to academic learning for which access and/or credit is sought, although the experience might not be acquired from formal sources. Other faculties (interestingly five of the more professionally oriented faculties) have less specifically structured indications of ARPL procedures in their respective related policies. These policies concentrate mainly on the recognition of modules for postgraduate work and stipulate the required information and application procedures. The processes within these faculties relate to the credit exchange model described by Osman and Castle (2004), where learning is viewed as a form of acquisition. Experience is seen as a commodity that can be traded and transferred. Therefore only experience accredited by an authority or institution is commonly recognised. Articulation of qualifications through the NQF and SAQA frameworks makes the process even easier. This approach is simple to administer, but it is more instrumental. Such an approach runs the risk of making little contribution to equity and redress in South Africa, as possible candidates have already been disadvantaged by their previous education. It is important to note that ARPL at the postgraduate level is both complex and potentially more risky than at the undergraduate level, as postgraduate studies entail not only modular work but also a research component. The research component demands a greater investment per student and students’ progress (or the lack thereof) tends to be more visible. In some cases only research-related output is required as the ultimate outcome. In these cases it may be difficult to award credit. Postgraduate access and programme requirements differ greatly among programmes. Because of these varying programme requirements, ARPL processes may be accommodated more easily on a case-by-case basis and faculty policies need to allow for a certain measure of flexibility in this regard.

Assessment strategies

The institutional policy indicates that where ARPL assessment processes are already established and are functioning well, they are to be maintained and constantly refined. The institutional policy gives faculties autonomy to decide which forms of ARPL should be given preference in the light of contextual variables. Six of the eight faculty
policies provide indications of assessment strategies and processes to be used in the ARPL process. The typical assessment instruments include the following:

- Admission assessment instruments, for example admission and placement tests and challenge examinations that are assessed quantitatively;
- Conditional admission, where an applicant was dealt with as a special admission and then allowed to ‘develop’ his/her performance in a learning programme;
- Supplementary work in advance according to specified expectations before final admission;
- Supplementary work during the course of the learning programme;
- Recognition of formal learning completed at other institutions, such as diplomas or degrees;
- Recognition of formal learning not certified as a qualification (or part thereof) by another higher education institution, such as short courses, workshops, in-service training courses, and/or projects;
- Recognition of non-formal or informal learning, for example learning in work undertaken at the initiative of the individual that would be to the applicant's advantage in the prospective programme;
- Service though involvement in regional/national associations/forums/working groups;
- Evidence of specific skills through leadership positions held, writing skills (articles), and/or courses developed;
- Recognition of participation in conferences, papers read, posters presented, and/or workshops presented;
- Recognition of special awards for exceptional achievements;
- Personal interviews;
- Learning portfolios, including an extensive set of documents and/or other evidence to illustrate prior learning that is qualitatively assessed by competent academic personnel.

There is congruence in the type of ARPL assessment instruments stipulated in the various faculty policies, although no standardised assessment procedures exist across faculties. The question, however, remains whether assessors are trained and competent in using these processes effectively within their contexts. This question is to be followed up in the following phase of the research, which investigates the implementation of ARPL at the university.

**ARPL support**

The training of experts (as facilitators and/or assessors) to deal effectively with ARPL is not stipulated in the institutional policy, although the policy does state: ‘...the University puts a high premium on providing appropriate information to, as well as providing preparation and guidance for ARPL applicants and assessors ...’. The major support
systems for ARPL mentioned in the respective faculty policy documents reside within the faculties themselves. Four faculties have well-defined support systems consisting of ARPL assessment committees and ARPL facilitators that have been appointed specifically to assist candidates in the ARPL process, whilst three utilised the existing structures such as programme committees (one did not mention any support services). The use of existing support structures can be beneficial if justified from a monetary and human resources point of view.

In all of the faculty policies, faculty officers are mentioned as the first and important interface between the ARPL candidate and the academic environment. The International Office is also mentioned as an important role player in the ARPL process when foreign learners apply for ARPL. This office makes recommendations on the corresponding levels of foreign qualifications if compared to institutional standards. No mention is made of how the personnel involved in ARPL (academic, administrative, or support personnel) are prepared or trained for their work in the ARPL process. Policies seem to be the only information available to these persons. ARPL learner support services are also not well defined within the faculty policies. The focus seems to fall on structural support through designating responsibility, rather than building integrated support systems for learners and personnel.

Monitoring and record keeping

The institutional ARPL policy places the responsibility for overall ARPL quality assurance at the level of the institution’s top management, while the continuous development of ARPL is monitored at the faculty level. Implementation of the ARPL policy at the institutional level is monitored by the Committee for Learning and Teaching (CLT), but managed by the faculties themselves. The evaluation of ARPL forms part of the process of programme evaluation through compulsory self-evaluation and external peer evaluation processes.

The institutional policy makes no mention of specific record-keeping systems other than official structures put in place to monitor ARPL policy development and implementation. Faculty policies concentrate on where the responsibility for the implementation of such measures lies, rather than on the specifics of the measures themselves. Record-keeping procedures do not seem well formulated in policy in the majority of the faculties. A lack of specific ARPL monitoring guidelines could limit the effective quality assurance monitoring of ARPL policies in practice. The lack of a standardised, or systematic record-keeping system within faculties would make it extremely difficult to account for the success (or failure) of ARPL and its candidates within the total system.

ARPL cost recovery

No specific guidelines in terms of ARPL cost recovery are given in the institutional policy – possibly because the main responsibility for implementation is directed
towards the individual faculties. Van Rooy (2002) argues that justifiable variations in fee structures are acceptable, as different assessment instruments may require different monetary and time input from those involved in the assessment. Only three faculties addressed cost implications in their respective policies, which ranged from all the costs related to ARPL covered in full by the applicant, to an unspecified fee determined by the management committee of the faculty. The relative novelty and low frequency of ARPL at the university could account for the lack of a universal fee structure at the time of the research. Cost recovery may become more important if ARPL starts to require more resources.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

The elements of ARPL policies discussed above all contribute to the effective implementation and practice of ARPL in higher education. There are, however, specific issues of variance evident in the analysis of both institutional and faculty ARPL policies that hold implications for practice. Policy analysis in this case thus suggests a number of implications for practice.

Even though relatively clear guidelines exist (in the form of SAQA implementation documents, or through the institutional policy), the majority of the faculty policies do not address all these aspects. Some of the policies at faculty level are aligned to national and/or institutional policy, but often fail to give clear and unambiguous directives to contextualise practice. The policies that are contextually applicable, concise and practical stem from faculty-specific experience in ARPL prior to mandatory policy development. Policy variance in terms of ARPL conceptualisation, purposes, processes and assessment strategies implies a lack of a shared ARPL vision and varied implementation. Faculties with experience in ARPL may need to take the lead and give context-sensitive input in overall policy development. Continuous monitoring, debate and revision are therefore imperative within all faculties as practice will inform institutional ARPL policy in future.

National ARPL policy forms the most important point of departure for any further related policy development in higher education. The national ARPL policy and the SAQA guidelines for implementation (2004) cannot be ignored in the South African context, but they do leave room for context-specific interpretation within institutions of higher education. The implication for practice of a context-specific interpretation relates to how and why ARPL is used. The analysis of policies at both the institutional and faculty levels indicates that the approach to ARPL is instrumental, rather than transformational. As a result, ARPL is aimed mostly at access, as opposed to awarding credit or qualifications. Among other things, this might point to a possible lack of clarity in the understanding of the different purposes of ARPL at the faculty level.

Institutional policies can be seen as context-specific interpretations of national policy that, in turn, lead to even more contextualised policies within faculties. Not all faculties have the same need for ARPL and therefore their approach to ARPL differs. The distinction
between ARPL for access and/or credit holds practice implications for programme and curriculum design and assessment procedures, which will vary in the different faculties. Some faculties will have a demand for ARPL at the undergraduate level, while others may only concentrate their efforts on programmes at the postgraduate level. This is an important aspect as it has a determining effect on integration and collaboration among institutions, professional bodies and the world of work. The implications for ARPL practice therefore extend beyond the specific university, and contextualisation needs to be balanced with a clear understanding and a co-ordinated implementation of ARPL at both the institutional and national levels.

Responsibility for ARPL implementation and quality assurance (in terms of validity, reliability, justice, and fairness) needs to be stipulated in both institutional and faculty policies to provide clarity on how ARPL fits into the larger assessment and quality assurance procedures of each faculty as well as of the institution. At present, accountability for ARPL resides mostly within faculties, where a lack of monitoring and record keeping makes it difficult to assess implementation and ensure quality assurance. At this particular institution, recent peer evaluation of programmes in at least one faculty pointed to limited attention to the importance of ARPL as a quality element in curricula. This might have implications for other faculties and the value attached to the transformational potential of ARPL.

There are several generic ARPL process components, of which SAQA (2004, 32) proposes an example. The direct application of all these components may, however, differ considerably amongst faculties and academic disciplines. A simple process that can be adapted and that offers a variety of options but still complies with quality standards, might be desirable. Clear, concise, and practical guidelines are imperative if ARPL is to succeed at the higher education level and thus constant revision is necessary to adapt to changing needs and circumstances. Institutional and faculty ARPL policies are not independent entities, but are rather interdependent, guiding and informing sound practice. It appears from the case studied that efforts to align ARPL policy need to be strengthened at this particular institution.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, four main ideas emerged from the case study. Firstly, an analysis of policy is useful to understand the state of transformation within an institution, as policies present a window for the analysis of institutional practice. The institutional ARPL policy at the university notes the importance of ARPL in institutional transformation, but places the emphasis mainly on access at the postgraduate level.

Secondly, national and institutional changes necessitate a consideration of the ARPL processes at the specific university. The ARPL process can be transformative, or instrumental. Ineffective implementation of ARPL due to shortcomings in policy will marginalise a process that could contribute significantly to quality within the institution. In this case study, ARPL policies point to a more instrumental approach to ARPL, in
spite of an institutional commitment to transformation, equity and redress.

Thirdly, tension could develop if a balance is not achieved between the seemingly contradictory requirements of coherence and consistency, and those of flexibility according to context specific conditions and requirements. The institutional policy leaves much of the specifics up to individual faculties to contextualise within their own environments. There is logic to this approach, as the various faculties operate in vastly different contexts in terms of knowledge, learning and practice. It could, however, also leave room for possible misinterpretation and disputes about issues of governance, which hold far-reaching implications for the effective and efficient implementation of ARPL within these different settings.

Finally, policies are important, but provide only paper-based guidelines for practice. Policies are not static documents, but develop through and during implementation. ARPL is a relatively novel idea within the specific university. Initial policy development sets the scene, but its implementation will determine the value and contribution of ARPL within the institution. Thus a dual process is required to investigate how an institution implements ARPL through the analysis of policy as document and the analysis of policy as practice.

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