

Speech of Hon (Mrs) L.D.Dookun-Luchoomun
Minister of Education & Human Resources,
Tertiary Education & Scientific Research
RPL Launch in SEN
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Protocol

Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to you all.

It is a matter of deep pleasure for me to be in your midst today as we proceed with the launch of the upscaling of the Recognition of Prior Learning [RPL] project in one very key domain, a domain that I personally hold close to my heart, namely, that of the Special Education Needs.

In fact, this launch couldn't have come at a more opportune time: a much-awaited reform in this sector is currently actively underway as I had promised.

As you are definitely aware by now, Government is coming up with the SEN Authority Bill during this year's sitting of the National Assembly. This is a Bill that makes a strong case for the establishment of a SEN Authority, a new institutional framework that will regulate the sector, respond to the needs of stakeholders and, above all, cater for the full development of all our children.

You would wish to note that, over the last few days, my Ministry has been carrying out a consultation process with stakeholders on the Bill – and, I must say, the feedback has been positive and constructive on many counts.

There has been general agreement that capacity building and professional development are of cardinal importance in this sector. Indeed, there are many persons, including cadres, operating in the sector who do not have formal academic qualifications. However, they have served in SEN schools and organisations for quite some length of time and gained massive hands-on experience and expertise through experiential learning over the years.

My Ministry strongly believes that this capital of experience and expertise of cadres from SEN schools needs to be valorised and formally recognised.

May I remind you that this endeavour will also help us to respond to ILO's advocacy for the recognition of prior learning and prior experience to enhance mobility and lifelong learning opportunities of workers.

So, I reiterate that I am really very pleased to be with you today for the launch of the upscaling of RPL in the SEN domain for persons with your longstanding work experience.

That's our recognition of your prior learning and prior experience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The beginnings of RPL go back to just a few decades internationally and is relatively recent for Mauritius. But its benefits have for long been recognised.

Thus, it has the potential to improve employability, mobility and promote lifelong learning. It can and does improve worker's confidence, self-esteem and motivation to learn. In fact, more and more countries are in the process of establishing RPL systems for the purpose of promoting social inclusion and equity.

The economic argument is also strong. We are living in an age that witnesses a wide-scoped democratization of education and the 'massification' of further and higher education. It is therefore no surprise that practitioners and policy makers today agree that education is increasingly an agent of positive change to address socially, economically and politically confining boundaries.

In such a context, there should be no dead-ends for learners.

We cannot and should not afford to marginalise or place on the side-lines precious human resource.

Significant focus is hence being placed on the need to develop multiple pathways to facilitate easy movement of learners, young and experienced alike. We are here talking of movement

- *between education and training;*
- *between institutions, from one level to the next level of education; and*
- *between education & training and the labour market.*

These pathways are increasingly relying on recognition and validation of **all forms of learning**—whether formal, non-formal or experiential.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have, right from the outset, insisted that my Ministry actively supports this RPL initiative for actors serving in Special Education Needs schools and organisations. This explains why we sponsored the Carers and Assistant Teachers to undergo the RPL process on a pilot basis and subsequently earn the National Certificate in Special Education Needs Levels 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

Obviously, the process took us some time -- the enhanced RPL framework had been launched in 2016, following insights gained from on-going practice and feedback from different stakeholders locally and internationally. In the process I am made to understand that the services of international experts had been sought for validation of the strategy plan for RPL as well as training of Facilitators and assessors.

Today, therefore, we should be happy that, now that the piloting of the RPL for SEN for levels 2-4 has been successfully completed, it is now planned to be rolled out for all participants from SEN Schools and SEN Organisations, starting today with an orientation session for RPL SEN Level 4.

That having been said, let me seize this opportunity to heartily thank all the participants who have been through the pilot projects, as well as the managers of the schools and NGOs who have assisted the participants and facilitated the process.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me stress that the benefits of RPL for all of you, managers and educators, assistant teachers and carers and to the system as a whole, are enormous.

For one thing, this recognition of prior experience raises self-esteem and fosters strong morale as well as a sense of achievement amongst the Carers, Assistant Educators and Educators in the SEN sector. It will thus allow for registration of serving employees on formal qualification programmes.

For another, it also allows for an orientation towards lifelong learning and CPD, i.e. Continuous Professional Development and, ultimately, the professionalization of practice and quality teaching in SEN institutions.

However, do keep in view that this is not the end of the road.

The new call and need from workers in the 21st century to sustain employability and productivity is upskilling. The RPL equips you for further and higher level learning. Those of you who are obtaining the RPL award today and those who will register henceforth on the programme, will have increased mobility and opportunity to join formal training at MIE or any other institutions.

It my earnest desire that you take full advantage of this avenue that opens up for you so as to cope with new and emerging challenges in the sector.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Before I end, I must place on record something else equally worth appreciating in this RPL endeavour towards empowerment of the SEN personnel.

I personally see this as a powerful example of policy coherence and alignment. Thus, the Ministry of Education and two different institutions—the MQA and the MIE-- have come together for a common cause and objective and have worked together, namely to professionalize and at the same time to address the dearth of skilled professionals in the SEN sector.

This is laudable in that it enables the provision of quality service in education.

A word of praise is also in order for the MQA that has a key responsibility in the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. The NQF, as you can guess, stays as a central backbone of our educational system and plays a crucial role in the articulation between the education and training system. We should be

proud today for opening more doors and creating more opportunities by democratising access to valued qualifications.

No one should be left behind, and it is only natural that active and key players in SEN must also be an integral part of the National Qualifications Framework.

But I need to highlight that the time has also come for MQA to establish an effective monitoring and evaluation system, and to start collecting and disseminating information about the impact of RPL. Emphasis should be laid on results.

I would also wish to make a special call for more active participation of the private sector in promoting cost-sharing and sustainable funding for RPL.

Capacity building is an investment not an expenditure. We are one of the pioneers in the African region to roll out the RPL to formalise prior learning and experience. Beyond being a matter of national pride, the RPL will definitely contribute towards professionalisation in delivery of services and education in SEN Institutions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me reassure you of my continual and unflinching support to ensure high quality teaching and offer desired and relevant learning experiences to every learner in the republic of Mauritius, irrespective of his or her diversity and learning predisposition.

I wish all of you, participants, a fruitful training session with the MQA and the MIE regarding the Portfolio Development for RPL.

I am totally confident about your ability to go through the process successfully.

Above all, we should make it our duty and pride to be the showcase for the effectiveness of RPL in the region.

I thank you all for your kind attention.