

cidb ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR LEARNING (APL)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In terms of sections 5(2)b of the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb) Act, (Act No.38 of 2000), the cidb Board is empowered to establish best practice Standards. The cidb Competence Standard for Contractors (Gazette No. 39074, 07 August 2015), establishes minimum competence standards contractors should aspire to, in:

- business management; and
- building and construction management (operational and supervision).

These competencies need to reside with the owner and/or key nominated representatives of the contractor. Where a contractor or his/her nominated representative do not have the formal qualifications for the competence level applied for but have the relevant experience, the cidb can facilitate an external assessment of their competences through interviews and a submission of a portfolio of evidence, a process referred to as an Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). The interview questions are based on the APL tool that consists of various construction site related scenarios which assess the critical areas of business and works management.

1. BACKGROUND

In terms of sections 5(2)b of the Construction Industry Development Board (cidb) Act, 2000 (Act No.38 of 2000), the cidb Board is empowered to establish best practice Standards. The cidb Competence Standard for Contractor Competence Assessment (Gazette No. 39074, 07 August 2015), referred to here as "the Standard", sets minimum competence standards to which contractors should aspire to, thereby encouraging performance improvement. The Standard recognises the key competencies of a contracting business as:

- business management; and
- building and construction works management (operational and supervision).

The Competence Standard provides for a standard method of assessing and recognising the competencies of a contracting enterprise within a cidb Class of Construction Works, a Construction Category and where relevant a Sub-Category. Recognition of minimum competency requirements within a Construction Category / Sub-Category satisfies the recognition criteria for all lower Construction Categories within a Class of Construction Works.

The competencies identified in the Standard need to reside with the owner and/or key nominated representatives of the contractor. Where the competencies reside with a nominated representative, the nominated representative must either be an employee of the company, or must be accessible to the company for the duration of any construction works to be undertaken by the contracting enterprise, and must be declared on tender.

Furthermore, the Standard has been incorporated as an exit outcome indicator of public sector-sponsored skills development opportunities within contractor development programmes (CDPs) and other contracting skills development opportunities. Specifically, the Standard is incorporated as a training requirement into the cidb National Contractor Development Programme (NCDP) Guidelines for Implementing Contractor Development Programmes¹ and as a guideline to inform enterprise development opportunities within the cidb Standard for Indirect Targeting for Enterprise Development.

In a formal setting, these competencies identified in the Standard are taught in programmes that include the following critical areas:

a) **Business Management**

- contract and legislation compliance;
- tendering and productions;
- project programming and progress;
- business planning;
- financial management; and
- resource management (including HR).

¹ DPW/cidb (2011). *National Contractor Development Programme; NCDP Summary Framework*. Department of Public Works and the Construction Industry Development Board, September 2011, cidb.org.za

b) Works Management

- planning and scheduling;
- resource management (labour, material, plant and equipment);
- cost control and monitoring;
- safety, health and environment;
- administration; and
- quality.

Works and Business management are both equally important to the success of a contracting enterprise and there a number of areas where the critical areas overlap, such as management of resources and planning. Although these topics have been assessed in both works and business management they may focus on different specific outcomes.

Figure 1 below illustrates the key roles in a large contracting enterprise. Whereas in a small contracting enterprise the owner will perform most of the duties, larger enterprises have dedicated people with skills and competences to perform very specific roles in the company. The competence assessments are therefore a way to measure the competences of small contractors in the roles identified as critical for running a successful contracting enterprise. Where a contractor or his/her nominated representative do not have the formal qualifications for the competence level applied for, the cidb will facilitate an external assessment of their competences through interviews and a submission of a portfolio of evidence, a process referred to as an Assessment of Prior Learning (APL).

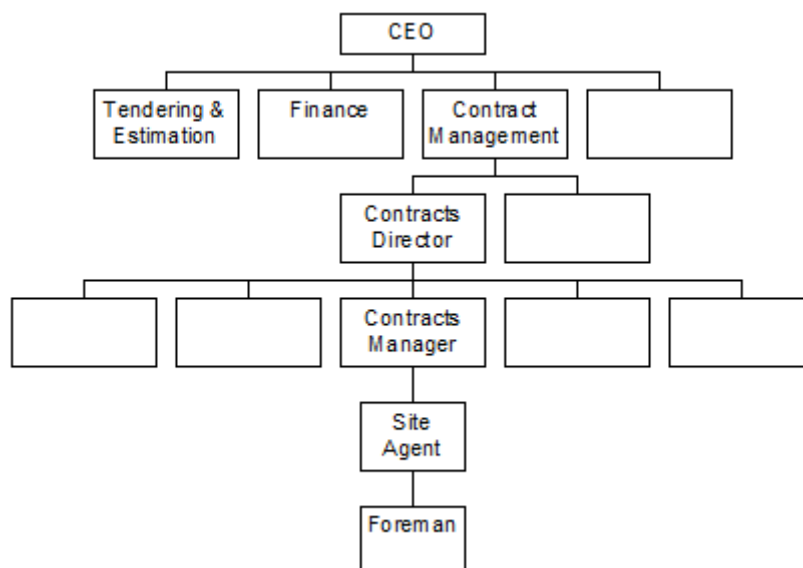


Figure 1: Organogram of a contracting enterprise

The APL is based on a set of standardised questions pegged against minimum NQF requirements of formal qualifications for the required competencies.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The APL project aims to validate the APL assessment tool and determine whether it adequately assesses the integration of knowledge, skills, and experience required to run a sustainable contracting enterprise.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Development of the Assessment Tool

A standardised database of questions was developed by the cidb to assess the competence of contractors and/or their nominated representatives. The tool was designed for Civil Engineering (CE) and General Building (GB) contractors in cidb Grades 2 to 6.

The APL tool is currently designed for:

- Grades 2 to 4; Business Management and Works Management; and
- Grades 5 and 6; Business Management and Works Management.

To ensure validity and reliability, the tool had to meet the following criteria:

- be objective enough to yield similar outcomes when used by multiple assessors;
- adequately assess the integration of knowledge, skills and experience required to run a sustainable contracting enterprise;
- clearly indicate the questions covering critical knowledge areas;
- indicate questions covering elective knowledge areas; and
- provide multiple questioning techniques to provide for cross-checking of competences.

The questions are designed as a detailed case study representative of typical operating scenario/s encountered in the construction industry. A set of question and model answers are then derived from the contracting scenarios.

3.2 Assessor Criteria

A panel of service providers is appointed and has to meet the following criteria:

- have extensive experience in managing and supervising sustainable construction companies;
- have relevant qualifications in construction management and financial or Business management; and
- be involved in training and development within the construction industry.

3.3 Contractor Selection

The project targets contractors within contractor development programmes (CDPs) or cidb registered contractors with Grades 2 to 6 in General Building (GB) or Civil Engineering (CE) Classes of Works. Qualifying contractors are identified by the cidb provincial offices and requested to participate in the project. The qualifying criteria for participating contractors are as follows:

- active Grade 2 to 6 GB or CE contractors;
- must be currently busy with a contract, or have completed a project in the last 12 months;
- contractors who are on or were part of a contractor development programmes;
- contractors (business owners) with at least 5 years' experience in the industry;
- contractors whose supervisor/foreman had more than 5 years' experience in the industry;
- and
- willing to subject themselves to a competence interview for the assessment.