

Recognition of Prior Learning and Other
Competence at the University of Vaasa as
of 1 August 2022

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1 Purpose of the guideline

The Recognition of Prior Learning and Other Competence at the University of Vaasa guideline specifies the stipulations provided in the Degree Regulations of the University of Vaasa.

The purpose of the guideline is to:

- 1) describe the procedures whereby the recognition of prior learning and other competencies described in the relevant sections of the Universities Act and the Degree Regulations of the University of Vaasa are applied at the University of Vaasa
- 2) support academic personnel and other employees who work in study guidance and counselling as they identify, recognise, assess and accredit prior learning and other competence and perform credit transfer in practice
- 3) instruct students to act in accordance with the University's procedures in situations related to recognition and accreditation of prior learning.

The Schools and other units that provide teaching at the University may have further specifications to this guideline. In addition to this guideline, concise instructions will be prepared for the use of academic personnel and students describing the procedures included in this guideline from the different actors' perspectives.

2 Legislative background and scope of application

According to the Universities Act (558/2009, Section 44(3)), when studying for a degree or when completing a professional specialisation programme, the student may, as determined by the university, have studies that he or she has completed in another Finnish or foreign higher education institution or other educational establishment counted towards the degree or specialisation programme if the prior studies are of an equivalent level. The student may, as determined by the university, credit and compensate for studies required by the degree or specialisation studies also by demonstrating his or her knowledge in some other manner.

According to Section 17 of the Degree Regulations of the University of Vaasa, when completing a degree or specialisation studies, the student may credit studies completed in a Finnish or foreign university or other educational institution and compensate for degree or specialisation studies with other studies of the same level. As a rule, studies to be credited shall be no more than ten years old and be included in the minimum scope of the degree.

According to Section 17(2) of the degree regulations, the student may credit and compensate for studies also by demonstrating his or her competence in some other way.

Theses may not be credited. (Degree Regulations of the University of Vaasa, Section 17(3).)

In the accreditation of studies and other competence at the University of Vaasa, the national recommendations on the recognition of prior learning are applied. This guideline is based on those recommendations.

The scope of application of this guideline is the same as that of the Degree Regulations of the University of Vaasa (Section 1).

3 Recognition of prior learning and other competence: key concepts

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is the procedure through which students' competence can be assessed and accepted as part of their studies.

Identification of prior learning refers to the assessment of competence in its various forms, and *recognition* to the procedure whereby students' identified and assessed prior learning or experience is validated and entered as credit transfer. The recognition of students' competence is based on the learning outcomes of the degree and its parts (study modules or study units).

Competence may be earned in

- *formal learning* (formal education)
- *non-formal learning* (continuing education, liberal adult education, etc.) or
- *informal learning* (e.g. work experience, positions of trust, hobbies)

Accreditation

- The approval, confirmation and validation of a student's previously completed studies, practical training, internships, work experience or other competence as part of the degree, study module or study unit.
- Studies or other competence to be accredited must correspond to the learning outcomes set for the degree or parts thereof.
- Accreditation can take the form of inclusion or substitution.

Inclusion

- The acceptance of a study unit or module completed elsewhere as part of a student's degree in free choice studies as it is.

Substitution

- A student is awarded a study unit or part thereof included in the curriculum based on the student's previous studies or other competence.

4 Principles for identification and recognition of competence

The curricula of the University of Vaasa are competence-based, and the recognition and accreditation of prior learning are always based on the learning outcomes of the curriculum.

Credits of studies completed by the curriculum may be accredited as follows:

- Credits earned by completing study units at a Finnish higher education institution and otherwise acquired learning that matches the learning outcomes of the degree to be completed.
- Credits earned by completing study units at a foreign higher education institution and otherwise acquired learning that matches the learning outcomes of the degree to be completed.
- The study unit is successfully completed.
- Prior learning is recognised as fully as possible.

- From the perspective of credit transfer, whether or not a student has been awarded credits for their prior learning in a previous degree is irrelevant. Studies connected to prior university degrees can be used to substitute compulsory studies belonging to the degree requirements. However, it is not possible for credits included in a first-cycle degree to contribute towards a second-cycle degree when those degrees are included in the same degree education.

Example: A student has a study right in communications studies. No credits included in their Bachelor of Humanities degree can be counted towards their Master of Philosophy degree if the degree is completed in the Multidisciplinary Master's Programme in Communication or Master's Programme in Technical Communication (communication studies as the major).

- Credits included in the degree that gave eligibility for admission to the Master's programme can only be counted towards compulsory studies. Compulsory studies refer to the studies that are defined at the study unit level of the degree programme curriculum and must be completed to earn the degree.
- In the prior learning recognition process, the level of the studies to be accredited may be considered. Tertiary-level studies included in an upper secondary-level degree can always be accredited if they (e.g. a Statistics study unit) have been completed at the University of Vaasa or another Finnish university.

4.1 Scope and grading of studies in credit transfer

When assessing a decision for substitution, the primary consideration is given to the learning outcomes of the study unit and module, not the number of credits.

- A negative difference of up to one credit between the study unit to be substituted and the previous study attainment is acceptable if the learning outcomes correspond to one another. Credit transfers are entered in the academic record in accordance with the number of credits of the study unit or module to be substituted. For example, if a student has completed a study unit of four credits with which they wish to substitute a study attainment of five credits, they are awarded the substituted study attainment of five credits.
- The scope of a credit transfer in substitution cannot be greater than the number of credits defined for the substituted study unit in the curriculum. For example, if a student has completed a study unit of seven credits and applies for a credit transfer of five credits, five credits will be transferred.
- Transfer students are an exception to this rule, as all their credits are recommended to be transferred in full.
- Based on prior learning, a study unit may also be substituted partially. In such cases, the responsible teacher determines how the student can complement their prior learning to complete the study unit fully.

- Example: A teacher estimates that the student's prior learning partially fulfils the learning outcomes of a study unit. To verify the attainment of all the learning outcomes, the student writes an essay or takes an exam, for example.

Study attainments that have been completed previously or elsewhere and that will be included in the student's degree are registered in the student's study register in accordance with the original scope of the course.

- Inclusion entries can be made either one study unit at a time or as larger units if the information about the studies in question can be entered in the additional information section in a sufficiently personalised and clear manner.
- In a Bachelor's degree, it is possible to include a study module completed in a university of applied sciences (e.g. teacher's pedagogical studies)
- In a Master's degree, it is only possible to include a specialisation studies-level study module completed as part of a Master's degree in a university of applied sciences.
- Studies with the minimum scope of 15 credits completed at a Finnish or foreign university as part of a study module (e.g. 15 credits or 25 credits) can be accredited in the degree as a module (e.g. basic courses/basic studies).

In credit transfer, the extent of the studies is always given in credits. Credit transfers are, thus, never entered as zero credits in the academic record.

All studies accredited through credit transfer are graded on a scale of 1 to 5 according to the initial assessment unless there is a justifiable reason to do otherwise. A justifiable reason may be, for example, that a previously completed study unit has been assessed with a scale of 'pass'/'fail', the study unit to be substituted is assessed at the University of Vaasa as 'pass'/'fail' or a previously completed study attainment has been assessed with some other assessment scale. Recognition of competence acquired in non-formal education is assessed on a scale of 'pass'/'fail'.

If more than one study unit is recorded in the same study attainment, the grade given shall be 'pass' unless there is a justifiable reason to do otherwise.

4.2 Restrictions

- Credits will not be transferred if the student has already completed the study unit they want to substitute or which they want to have recognised based on competence they have acquired through other means.
- Credits earned by completing a thesis or a maturity test cannot be transferred.
- The principles and practices of credit transfer in the Open University and other non-degree studies are the same as in other education apart from when a student has the right to complete only a single study unit, in which case the RPL procedure is not applied at all.
- Studies completed as continuous education may be included in a degree if the study units in question are included in the curriculum of a higher education institution.
- For a completed Leadership and instructor training for conscripts (JOKO), a student will receive 15 credits in the degree provided that the JOKO training was started after 1 January 2019 and they have completed at least 15 credits of it.

5 Principles and forms for demonstration of competence

The procedure for demonstrating and documenting competence is used, where appropriate, to identify, recognise and assess prior learning.

The modes of study of a study unit in the curriculum must not restrict the recognition of prior learning. It cannot be assumed that a previously acquired competence should have been gained in a manner included in the curriculum. What is required is that the student can demonstrate that their existing competence corresponds with the respective learning outcomes.

In the demonstration and assessment of competence, it is recommended that various goals in line with the learning outcomes are used. The modes of demonstration may be the same as the modes of study described in the curriculum and the course, but they may also differ.

6 Rights and responsibilities of the student

The student is responsible for initiating the accreditation process.

- Degree students must not apply for accreditation if they do not intend to include the study units in question in their degree.
- The student is obliged to submit all the documents required in the processing of the accreditation application.
- To have competence acquired in another way than through formal learning recognised, it is the students' responsibility to demonstrate their competence in the manner determined by the teacher or person responsible for the study in question. Students may suggest ways to demonstrate their competence.
- The student has the right to receive guidance in making an application for the recognition of prior learning and demonstrating competence acquired in another manner.

Effective RPL procedures make it easier for students to begin their studies and progress smoothly. Accreditation of prior learning streamlines the studies. When students who have already achieved the learning outcomes of a particular study unit or module can substitute studies in their degree, they can complete study modules and units and progress smoothly in their studies. It will, for example, free-up places in the language groups for other students studying the module.

A student can request rectification of recognition of prior learning. A student dissatisfied with the recognition of studies completed at another institution or prior learning demonstrated in other ways can request rectification orally or in writing from the person who made the decision. The student must justify their request for rectification.

A rectification request against a credit transfer decision must be lodged within 14 days of receiving notification of the decision. A student dissatisfied with the decision taken on the request for rectification may bring the matter to the Education Council within 14 days of the date the student was first informed of the decision. The rectification request shall specify the change the student

requests and justifications for the request. The rectification request and its justification shall be submitted to the Education Council in writing as follows:

- sent by post to Kirjaamo, Vaasan yliopisto, P.O. Box 700, 65101 Vaasa, Finland
- sent by email to kirjaamo@uwasa.fi

7 Rights and responsibilities of the University

Joint principles and procedures are applied to ensure students' legal protection in the recognition and accreditation of prior learning.

A teacher or another person who assesses prior learning is obliged to observe the common principles and the right to make a negative decision if the learning or competence proposed for approval does not fulfil the principles laid down in this guideline (e.g. learning outcomes).

Teachers and other staff members who provide academic guidance and counselling are obliged to supervise the student in the application for credit transfer or in the demonstration of competence acquired in another manner. The University is obliged to process the student's application for the recognition of prior learning.

The person who has made the decision on credit transfer is obliged to process any oral or written rectification requests made by the student. If the student is dissatisfied with the decision made on a rectification request, the decision and its justifications must be presented in writing. All matters concerning the student are to be processed without undue delay, and the decisions are to be made within a reasonable time.

The University is obliged to archive all decisions related to the recognition of prior learning and their enclosures until the student graduates.

8 RPL and the curriculum

According to the Degree Regulations of the University of Vaasa (Section 14), a curriculum includes the scientific and professional learning outcomes of the degree programme, the study modules of the degree programmes and the learning outcomes of the other degree programmes and individual study units. The objectives are drawn up by describing the competence that the student must achieve at the level of degrees, study modules and study units.

The curriculum is drawn up to enable studies to progress smoothly. The competence-based curriculum entails that the learning outcomes can be fulfilled in various ways, including ways other than by completing the study units according to the curriculum.

From the perspective of the identification, recognition, assessment and accreditation of prior learning, the learning outcomes defined for the degree programmes, study modules and study units form the basis upon which students can estimate the accreditation of their prior learning.

Curriculum design must ensure that if any prior learning is considered to correspond to the study to be substituted, the student is not required to acquire the same competence a second time. No double credits shall be registered within a degree. Instead, such situations must be solved by curriculum design. If the same study unit is part of more than one study module, the curriculum shall detail how a student who has already completed the unit may build the study module to fulfil

its learning outcomes and minimum scope. If no alternatives are described in the curriculum, the study attainment is agreed upon in the personal study plan.

9 RPL and study guidance

The accreditation of studies is part of the student's personal study planning and PSP guidance, in the course of which, among other things, the suitability of prior learning as part of the degree to be completed at the University of Vaasa and the achievement of its learning outcomes is assessed.

For the students' studies to proceed as smoothly as possible from the beginning, the possibility of accrediting studies is communicated immediately in the admission phase and again in orientation. The goal is to start the RPL procedure before the student begins studying at the University of Vaasa. Later, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer is encouraged when appropriate and justified.

In the RPL process, the student's role is active, and the student usually initiates the process. The RPL procedures and related guidance and counselling are considered in the planning and implementation of study guidance and counselling as a whole.

The Schools are not obliged to assess an applicant's prior learning before the application process. An RPL decision can only be made after a study right has been granted and the student has enrolled as present at the University of Vaasa.

10 Exchange studies

An exchange period is planned as part of the degree studies when the personal study plan is prepared. The studies abroad must be planned so that the credit transfer can be easily completed after the student returns to the University of Vaasa. A study plan is drawn up for the exchange period. In an Erasmus student exchange, the plan is always drawn up on the so-called learning agreement form in which the studies at the host university are recorded and agreed upon.

11 Recognition of communication and language studies

The principles observed in the accreditation of communication and language studies are as follows:

- The language studies included in previous university studies compensate, as such, the studies related to language proficiency laid down by the Government Decree on University Degrees.
- The student must apply for accreditation as instructed by the Language Centre.
- The Language Centre processes applications concerning compulsory language and communication studies.
- The Schools may accredit language and communication studies that are part of optional studies.

- Even if the scope of the completed language studies differs from the number of credits allocated at the University of Vaasa, the credit transfer is registered for the student in accordance with the University of Vaasa's curriculum.
- As a rule, partial accreditation is not granted.
- A student does not have to complete the second national language (Swedish or Finnish) study unit included in the degree if they have completed basic studies in Swedish or Scandinavian Languages or, correspondingly, in Finnish. Basic studies can demonstrate satisfactory proficiency, and intermediate studies good proficiency in the second national language, regardless of the final grade of the study module (Government Decree on the Demonstration of Proficiency in the Finnish and Swedish Languages in Civil Service (481/2003).)

12 Recognition of competence acquired in non-formal education

Competence can also be gained through non-formal learning (continuing education, liberal adult education studies) and informal learning (learning acquired through work or hobbies, positions of trust).

Competence acquired through non-formal or informal learning shall correspond to the learning outcomes of the study in question. Students are required to provide evidence of their other competence (e.g. a certificate of employment, portfolio, diploma, publication or other written document) so that the competence may be assessed. The provided demonstration of competence cannot be based on competence acquired through non-formal or informal learning over 10 years ago. The student may be asked to provide evidence of competence, e.g. by writing an essay or participating in a written or oral exam or an interview. Making use of multiple assessment methods is recommended, but the procedure must not become more labour-intensive than the assessment of corresponding regular study attainment.

13 Accreditation process

Credit transfer is applied for with an electronic form maintained by Study and Education Services. If a student already has an accredited study unit from another university, a new accreditation is made based on the original academic record.

There is no need to reassess the accreditation of competence gained in another manner than formal education; the competence can be accredited as it is.

Sources and further information

RPL: national recommendations for universities. Approved in UNIFI's meeting of Vice-Rectors, 5 February 2020. http://oha-forum.fi/public_html/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/AHOTsuositukset-yliopistoille.pdf Retrieved on 17 May 2022

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