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# **Recognition Regulations and Practices in the European Higher Education Area**

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## Introduction

This report is the deliverable of WP1.1 as a part of WP1 aiming at analyses of existing standards and methodologies for recognition.

The report describes recognition regulations in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and practices in Estonia, Ireland, Poland and Portugal following the expectations of Ukrainian partners of the QUARSU project (see Annex 1). The analysis is presented in three aspects:

- Academic recognition of foreign academic qualifications and qualifications not included in the NQF for access to higher education,
- Recognition of prior learning (formal, non-formal and informal learning) for partial fulfilment of a study programme,
- Professional recognition of graduates.

Recognition of prior learning (RPL) has different definitions dependent on the context where it is used. In this report **RPL is a process by which formal learning** for recognised awards (diplomas or certificates), **informal learning** from experience (e.g. work based learning) **and non-formal learning** for uncertificated but planned learning (e.g. workshops/seminars that are uncertificated) **is given academic or professional recognition**<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1). This may be called **RPL in wide sense**. With this wide definition all three aspects analysed in this report fit under the RPL in wide sense.



Figure 1. The scope of RPL. Source: developed by Olav Aarna

**Academic recognition** is RPL for the purpose of further studies. **Professional recognition** is RPL for the purpose of employment, e.g. for professional status.

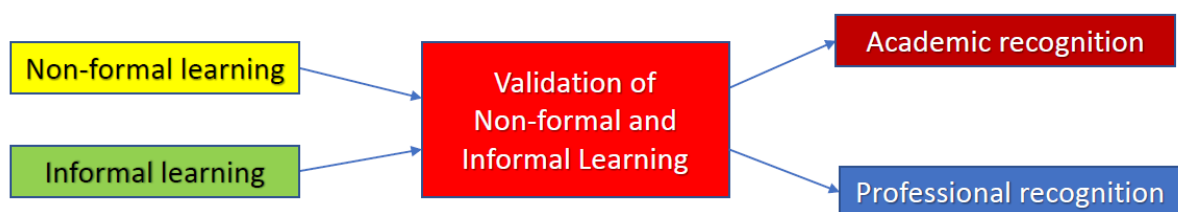


Figure 2. The scope of VNFIL. Source: developed by Olav Aarna

Many definitions of RPL (also known as APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) or APEL (Accrediting Prior Experiential Learning)), exclude formal learning covering only recognition of non-formal and informal learning. In the European Union (EU) this restricted version of RPL is called **Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning** (VNFIL, see Figure 2), which may be called **RPL in narrow sense**. The reason for introducing VNFIL is emphasising the underestimated role of non-formal and informal learning in the context of lifelong learning (LLL).

<sup>1</sup> This definition is partially overlapping with [Garnett et al., 2004](#) while adding an option of professional recognition.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) (see section 2.1) and the EU Recommendation on VNFIL (see section 2.3) provide coherent definitions of basic terms used in RPL and VNFIL (see Annexes 2 and 3), which will be used throughout this report.

The report consists of three chapters and ... annexes.

## 1. Conceptual Framework

This chapter provides a conceptual model for the RPL, opens the LLL context of the RPL and conceptualises three cases of RPL relevant for the QUARSU project.

### 1.1. Conceptual model of RPL

In the context of recognition, particularly RPL two concepts are paramount: **comparability** and **equivalence**. In mathematics both notions are defined as binary relations, i.e. relations between pairs of elements (objects) from a set<sup>2</sup>. Although this report will not develop a mathematical model of RPL the binary relational nature of these two concepts is important.

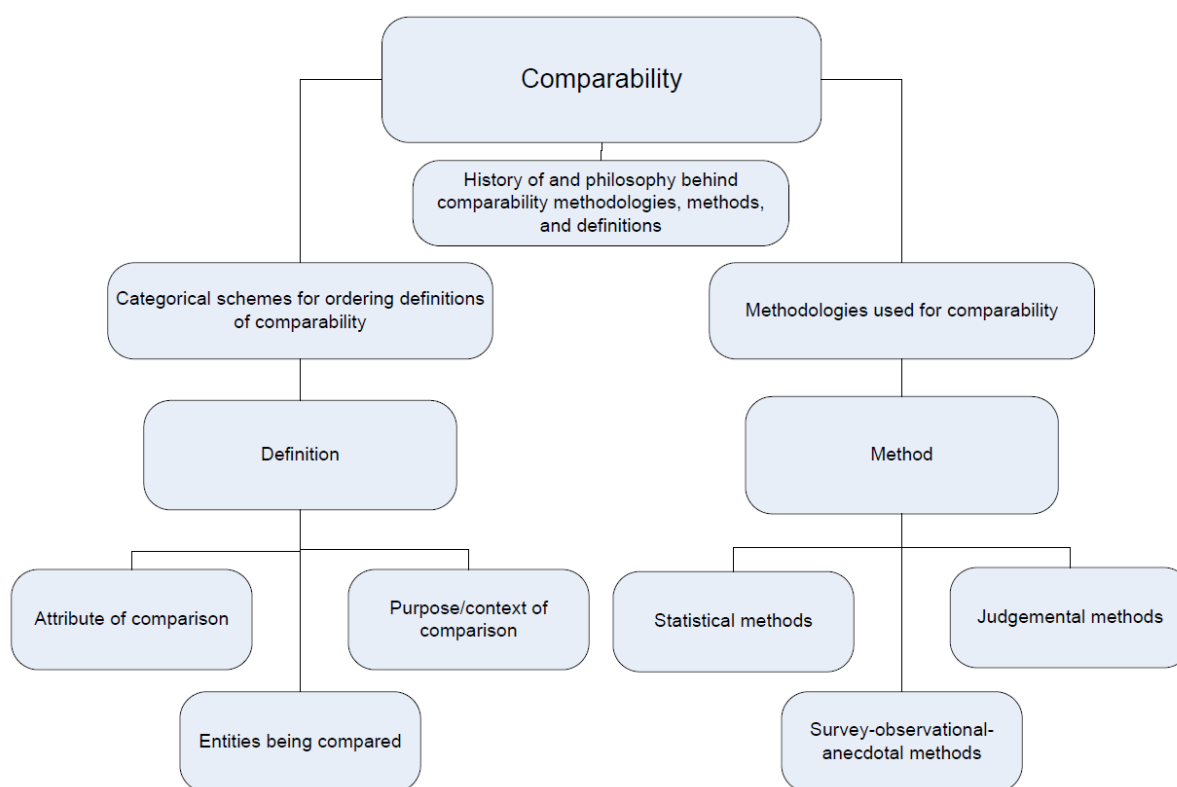


Figure 3. Conceptual framework for comparability research. Source: Elliot, G. (2013)<sup>3</sup>

The definition of comparability (and/or equivalence) includes three components as can be seen from Figure 3:

<sup>2</sup> Any two elements  $x$  and  $y$  of a set  $P$  that is partially ordered by a binary relation  $\leq$  are **comparable** when either  $x \leq y$  or  $y \leq x$ . If it is not the case that  $x$  and  $y$  are comparable, then they are called **incomparable**. Equivalence relation is a relation between elements of a set which is reflexive, symmetric, and transitive and which defines exclusive classes whose members bear the relation to each other and not to those in other classes.

<sup>3</sup> A guide to comparability terminology and methods.

<https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/130424-a-guide-to-comparability-terminology-and-methods.pdf>

- Attribute of comparison,
- Purpose/context of comparison,
- Entities being compared.

Legal acts are using the notion of “comparable” in the context of recognising foreign qualifications (see section 2.1). At the same time, comparability is defined through equivalence:

*Comparability is the notion of equivalence between qualifications of the same type offered in different institutions or countries. Comparability does not require complete conformity. (AEC, 2004)*

*Comparability is the formal acceptance between two or more parties that two or more qualifications are equivalent. Comparability is similar to credit transfer. (Harvey, 2004–11)*

The Oxford English Dictionary (2011) defines **equivalence** as “equal in value, power, efficacy or import”. However, in usage the term tends to mean “a degree of ...”, or “extent of ...”, implying that in practice, **equivalence is not absolute**. (Elliot, G. 2013)

Therefore, **conceptually RPL is based on assessing equivalence of two objects** (see Figure 4):

- Applicant’s LLL portfolio,
- Standard for RPL.

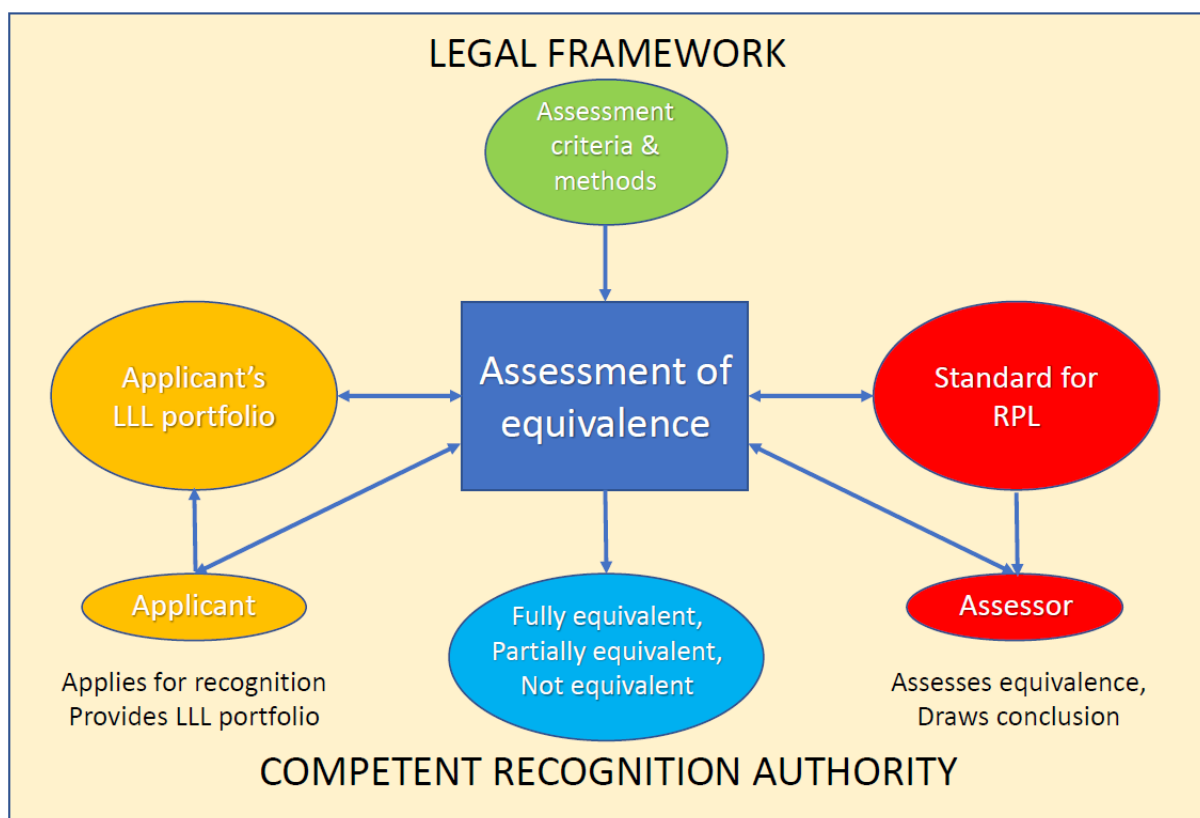


Figure 4. Conceptual model of RPL. Source: developed by Olav Aarna

An **applicant’s LLL portfolio** is a set of documents provided by a person seeking for the RPL. Portfolio provides evidence about the applicant’s competence (see section 1.2) described by:

- Academic qualification certificate(s),
- Professional qualification certificate(s),
- Competence profile(s),
- Academic transcript(s),

- Certificates from (in service) trainings,
- Other relevant documents.

Depending on the purpose and context of comparison the content of portfolio may be different. Three different purposes and contexts of RPL are specifically relevant for the QUARSU project (see sections 1.3-1.5).

A **standard for RPL** is a document used as a basis for assessing the equivalence. Depending on the purpose and context of comparison different standards for RPL are used (see sections 1.3-1.5).

The assessment of equivalence leads to one out of three possible **conclusions**:

- Fully equivalent,
- Partially equivalent,
- Not equivalent.

The assessment of equivalence is conducted under the auspices of a **competent recognition authority**, which depending on the context, can also be higher education institution (HEI). The whole process is governed by **international and national legal framework**.

Full equivalence may lead to equal rights or opportunities of certain type, e.g. access to higher education on certain level of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA).

**The concept of substantial difference** constitutes the key concept in the RPL, particularly in recognition of foreign qualifications (see section 2.1). The Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) states that each party shall recognise the higher education qualifications, periods of study and qualifications giving access to higher education conferred in another party, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the qualification or period of study for which recognition is sought and the corresponding qualification or period of study in the party in which recognition is sought. This approach can also be extended to other cases of RPL if properly contextualised.

In most occasions the legal acts or regulations do not define what substantial difference means. Particularly, vast majority of the LRC signatory countries have no national definition of the term substantial differences. This implies that the **competent recognition authority must have definitions of what may be considered to be a substantial difference** between the two objects, e.g. a foreign qualification and a similar/comparable national qualification.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2. RPL in the context of lifelong learning

The RPL, particularly VNFIL is one of the most valuable tools for increasing the participation of individuals in lifelong and life-wide learning. The high mobility of individuals in general, and the migration of the labour force in particular, allows the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences not only through formal learning, but also through work practices, social and work experiences. The need for transparent qualifications encourages countries to develop models for emphasizing vocational routes and work experience of individuals.

The RPL is a process where a competent (authorised) institution assesses the competence of an applicant based on specific criteria. The criteria are designed to assess how the applicant's knowledge, skills and attitudes match the entry requirements of the educational institution, the learning outcomes of the programme or sections of it or the competence requirements of professional standards. If the applicant meets the requirements, his/her competences or learning

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring\\_Implementation\\_LRC-Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring_Implementation_LRC-Final_Report.pdf) pages 48-55.

outcomes will be taken into account when considering the enrolment criteria and completion of the programme or upon awarding a professional qualification.

The notions of “competence”<sup>5</sup> and “learning outcomes”<sup>6</sup> are often used interchangeably, which is misleading. From the point of view of society, the labour market in particular, “to be competent” means person’s demonstrated (proven) ability to perform necessary roles, functions or tasks (as an employee, freelancer or just a member of society or community). The ability to perform necessary tasks or functions can be described as a set of necessary competences<sup>7</sup> or a competence profile. From the point of view of a person as a learner, “to be competent” as well as each one of competences is described through a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, called learning outcomes. In other words, competences and learning outcomes are two aspects of the dual notion “competence” or “to be competent” (see Figure 4).

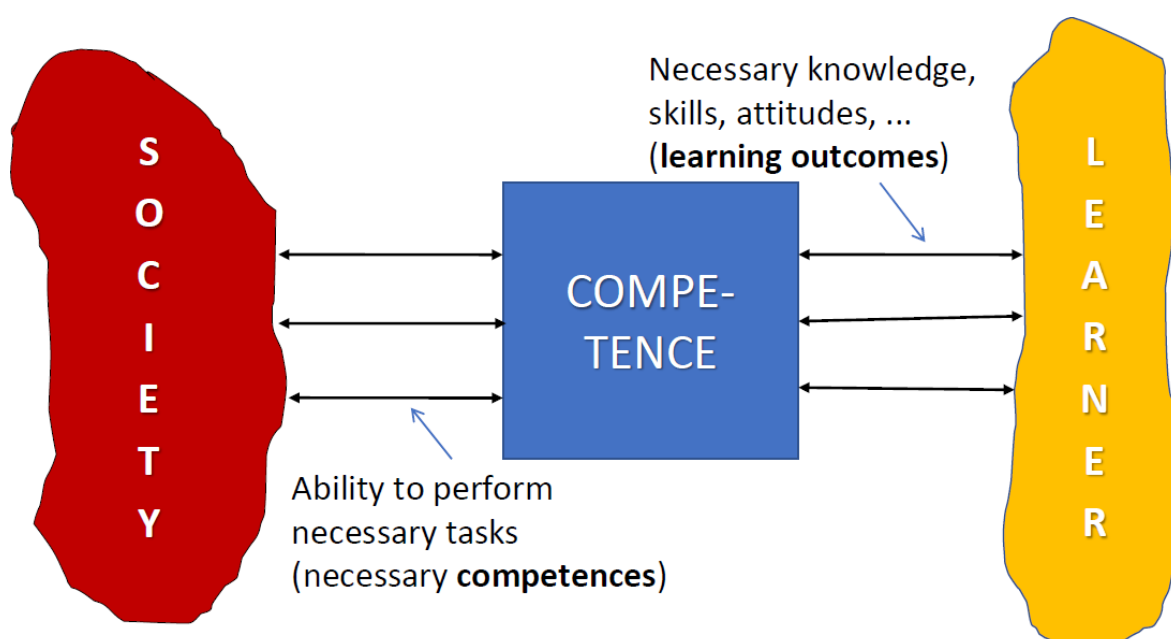


Figure 4. Dual nature of competence. Source: Tutlys, V., Aarna, O. (2017)<sup>8</sup>

RPL makes it possible to develop the relationship between lifelong learning and different levels of study. It also connects the world of education with the world of work by making people’s knowledge, skills and competences more visible and making it possible to put a value on them, regardless of how they were acquired. In principle, it means that a person entering further education or applying for a professional qualification can have their earlier studies or experience (for example, formal education courses completed or previous on-the-job training, vocational courses, or just their experience) recognised when applying for or in the course of a study programme. Study courses can be completed faster and they can be more target-oriented because there is no need to repeat what has already been learned, meaning courses can focus on passing on important new knowledge and skills.

RPL can be used when:

<sup>5</sup> *Competence* means the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

<sup>6</sup> *Learning outcomes* means statements regarding what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy.

<sup>7</sup> Often the constituents of the competence profile (competences) are called competencies.

<sup>8</sup> Tutlys, V., Aarna, O. (2017) The concept of competence in the education reforms in Lithuania and Estonia. *Competence-Based Vocational and Professional Education. Bridging the World of Work and Education*, ed. Martin Mulder, Springer, p. 381 - 406



- restarting interrupted studies,
- meeting enrolment criteria,
- changing programme (also within an educational institution),
- awarding a professional qualification,
- planning a career.

RPL makes it possible to consider, as part of a programme or when awarding a professional qualification:

- prior studies in educational institutions,
- knowledge and skills acquired through in-service training or independent studies,
- knowledge and skills acquired through professional and other experience.

RPL provides more flexible opportunities for obtaining an education, makes it possible to complete studies faster, saves the resources of the educational institution, the employer and the student and gives them an opportunity for self-realisation. Crucially, it also enables students to improve their position on the labour market. The gain is mutual as while RPL makes it possible to study based on prior professional experience, institutions utilising RPL gain well-motivated learners who bring practical experience to theoretical studies and are able to complete their studies in a shorter time.

People who could benefit from VNFIL include those who:

- wish to begin studies but lack the required qualification to get on to a course or programme;
- wish to study abroad but cannot easily establish that their education is adequate to meet the requirements of the educational institution in the foreign country (for example, there are many institutions that will allow study for a Master's degree without a corresponding Bachelor's degree, as long as the applicant can show that they have relevant experience to contribute);
- have already obtained a higher education but want to extend it or start working in another field: RPL can help avoid repeating modules or courses that have already been passed;
- wish to continue interrupted studies;
- wish to provide evidence of existing skills and knowledge when working towards a professional qualification;
- wish to have skills acquired informally through work or leisure activities recognised.

The following principles are essential in order to establish a sound RPL system on national or institutional level (see also section 2.3):

- the RPL **processes are centred on individuals** and their **enrolment for RPL is voluntary**;
- the **privacy of individuals is respected**;
- **equal access and fair treatment is guaranteed**, and at the same time inclusiveness and equal access to learning opportunities are ensured;
- **stakeholders are involved** in establishing the systems for validation;
- the system contains **mechanisms for guidance and counselling** of individuals;
- the system is underpinned by **quality assurance**;
- the **professional competences of those who carry out assessments** is assured.

The development and assessment of competences is a matter of proficient performance. In order to be able to identify competences in different "pieces of evidence" produced by the applicant, it is necessary for the assessor to have a strong understanding of the occupation/qualification being assessed.

Therefore, the **assessor must demonstrate a double set of professional qualities**. On one hand he/she must have relevant and current experience in the subject filed/occupation/qualification assessed. On the other hand he/she must be a qualified assessor, detaining skills and competences to

guide the candidates in producing/gathering evidence about their competences, and in weighting those evidences against the requirements of the relevant standard.

While defining the RPL mechanisms it is important to consider the **comparability of approaches to RPL at different levels and in various contexts**, as it is part of developing trust at local, national and international level. Lack of system comparability makes it difficult for individuals to recognise their learning outcomes acquired in different settings, at different levels and even in different countries.

In order to secure compatibility of RPL mechanisms it is necessary to understand a set of aspects meant to give coherence, consistency and robustness to these processes, such as the following ones:

- **RPL is referenced to national standards** (occupational standards, education and training standards, qualification standards, where the learning outcomes are defined for each qualification according to labour market specific needs and features);
- **RPL is based on the assessment of individual's competences or learning outcomes** (comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes; see Figure 4);
- the **assessment is conducted by competent assessors**, dully selected and trained;
- the assessment takes place in **assessment centres** which **are officially recognised by the national authorities**.

Understanding the LLL context of RPL is important for conceptualising the developments of QUARSU project.

### 1.3. RPL for access to higher education

In case of RPL for access to higher education the assessor assesses the applicant's portfolio against the study programme entry requirements (see Figure 5). In other words, assesses whether the

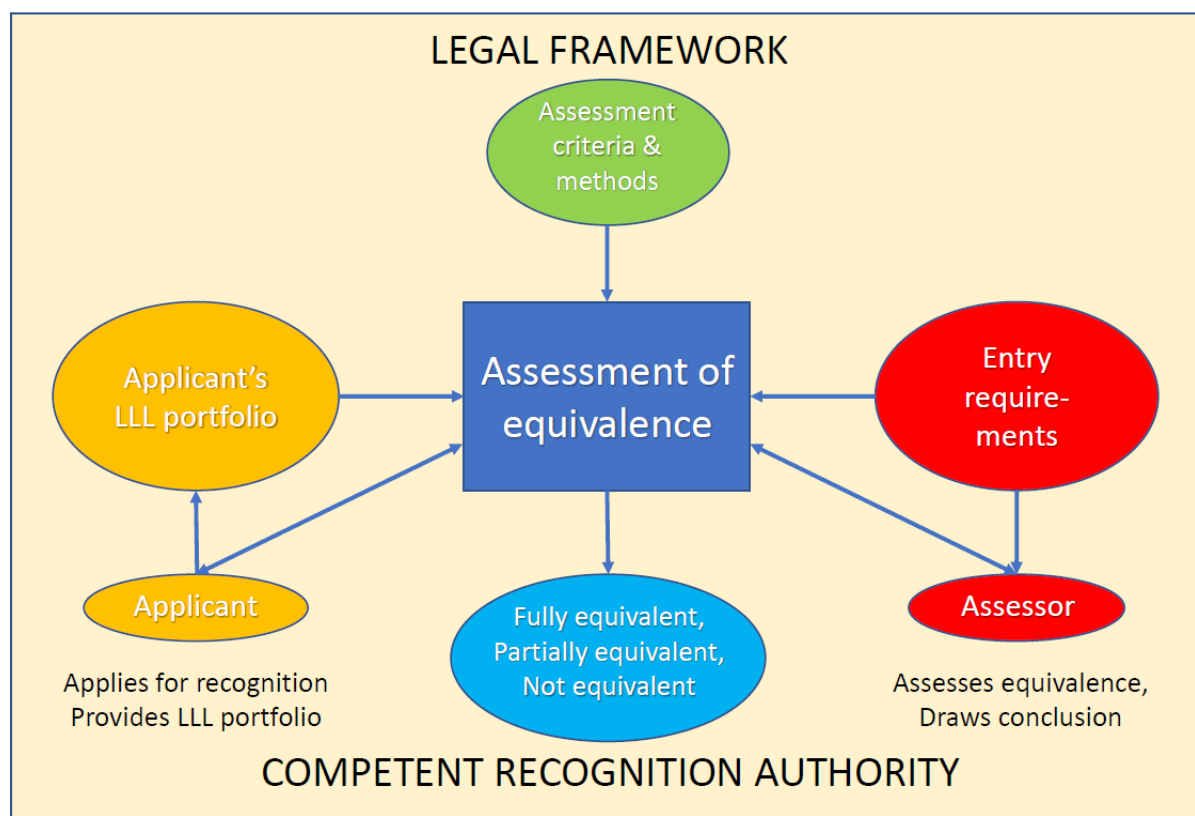


Figure 5. RPL for access to higher education. Source: developed by Olav Aarna

applicant is capable of continuing studies at the chosen level of higher education, e.g. the Bologna first cycle level. In other words, this is the case of academic recognition.

If the applicant holds an appropriate diploma or certificate of the home country, e.g. an upper secondary education certificate, no academic recognition is required. If the applicant holds a diploma or certificate from a foreign country the assessment of equivalence is conducted based on the principles of the LRC (see section 2.1). In certain occasions part of the entry requirements not covered by the applicant's academic qualification (partial equivalence) the missing components can be compensated from other parts of the portfolio, e.g. professional qualification or work experience.

Typically, the competent recognition authority in this case is the HEI. For assessing the equivalence of a foreign academic qualification to the academic qualification of the home country the HEI may ask advice from the national ENIC/NARIC centre (Academic Information Centre).

In case of recognition of foreign academic qualification the equivalence of a qualification awarded in a foreign country and a qualification awarded in the home country (and included in the NQF) can be established in several levels of detail:

- establishing that a foreign qualification has the same level as a qualification in the NQF. This is the less detailed degree of equivalence. In case both countries have NQFs referenced to the EQF establishing this equivalence is done automatically;
- establishing that a foreign qualification is of the same type as qualification in the NQF. This is the next degree of detail in establishing the equivalence. In case both countries are the Bologna member countries and have self-certified their higher education frameworks establishing this equivalence is again done automatically through the Framework of Qualifications of the EHEA (FQ-EHEA), i.e. using the notions of Bologna first cycle qualification, second cycle qualification etc.;
- establishing that a foreign qualification is of the same type and belongs to the same category of ISCED (e.g. field of study) or respective national classifier as a qualification in the NQF. Establishing this equivalence is more complicated and needs more detailed analysis of the respective study programme curriculum.

An additional case is **academic recognition of academic qualifications not included in the NQF** in the home country, e.g. awarded prior to establishing the NQF and/or not meeting the requirements of inclusion in the NQF (e.g. not described in terms of learning outcomes). In this case the equivalence of a qualification not included in the NQF and a qualification included in the NQF cannot be established using regular methods, e.g. comparison of learning outcomes of two study programmes. A possible solution can be establishing the equivalence through a legal act as it was done in Estonia (see section ...).

As far as recognition practices in the QUARSU project are related to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) context it is important to underline, that the levels of NQFs are not reserved exclusively for qualifications from the formal education system, e.g. higher education qualifications. In principle, different professional (occupational) qualifications acquired e.g. from work based learning context can also be placed in the NQF provided that they meet the respective requirements. This is one of the aims of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between **the level of a qualification in the NQF** and **the type of a qualification on certain level of the NQF** (e.g. the upper secondary school leaving certificate).

#### 1.4. RPL for partial fulfilment of a study programme

In case of RPL for partial fulfilment of a study programme, particularly a subject course or module the applicant's portfolio is assessed against the programme/module/course intended learning outcomes (see Figure 6). In other words, this is the case of academic recognition.

The need for this type of RPL is vital for applicants who are seeking recognition of a study period abroad or in another HEI of the home country or in a study programme of the same level of higher education.

The applicant's portfolio contains documents describing applicant's learning outcomes on this level of higher education<sup>9</sup>, particularly subject courses or modules completed in the HEI abroad or another HEI or another study programme of the home country.

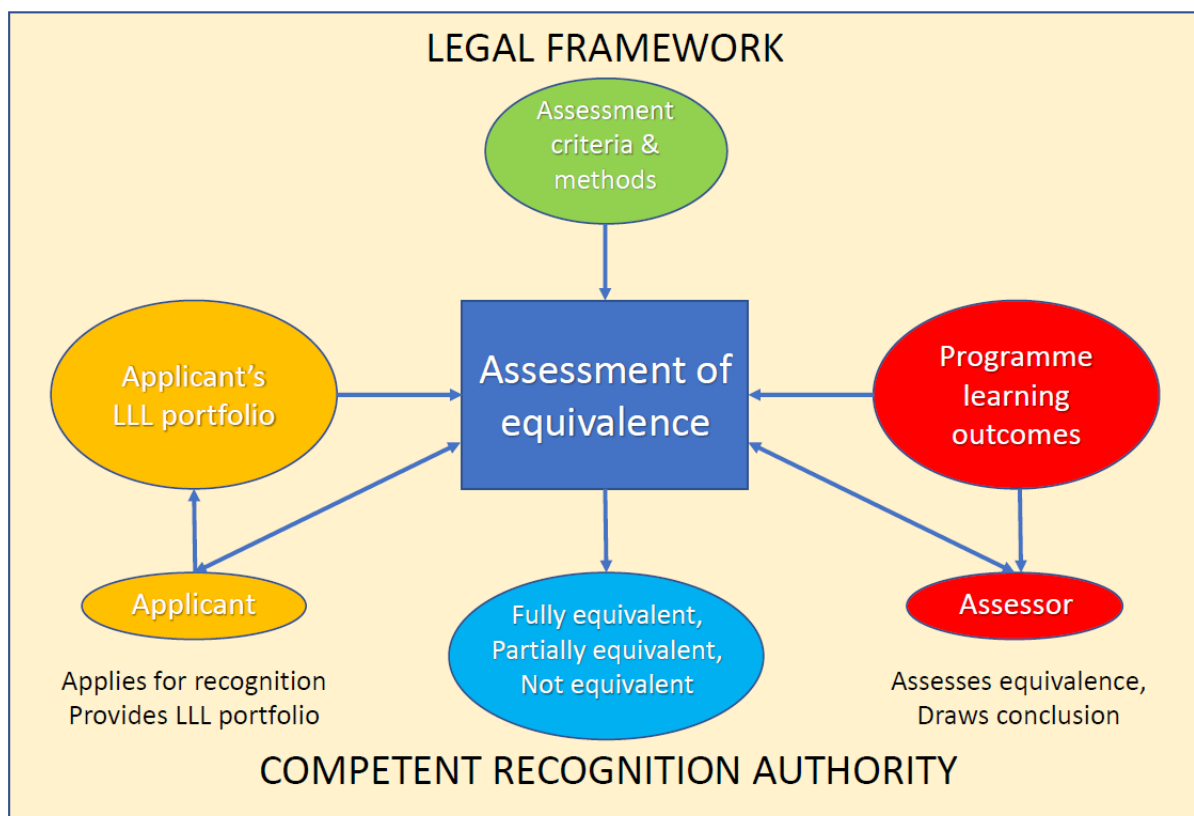


Figure 6. RPL for partial fulfilment of a study programme. Source: developed by Olav Aarna

Competent recognition authority in this case is the HEI.

### 1.5. Professional recognition of graduates

RPL plays a significant role in assessing the level of competence required for a professional (occupational) qualification (see Figure 7). The aim of a professional (occupational) qualification system is to help employees be more competitive, act as a support structure for the education system and help in assessing and recognising people's competence, regardless of where and how they acquired them. All professional qualifications have requirements set by a professional body to ensure that people completing the qualification and being awarded a certificate are competent in the area concerned. The applicant's actual competence is assessed against professional (occupational) qualification standard, regardless of the way it was acquired (formal learning, non-formal learning, i.e. skills and knowledge acquired by training, courses, professional experience, and informal

<sup>9</sup> As a rule, learning outcomes from lower levels of formal education system can not be recognised for partial fulfilment of a study programme

learning). If a person has prior experience and knowledge that meets the professional qualification standard, they should have an opportunity to prove it. Applicant can support his/her claim through

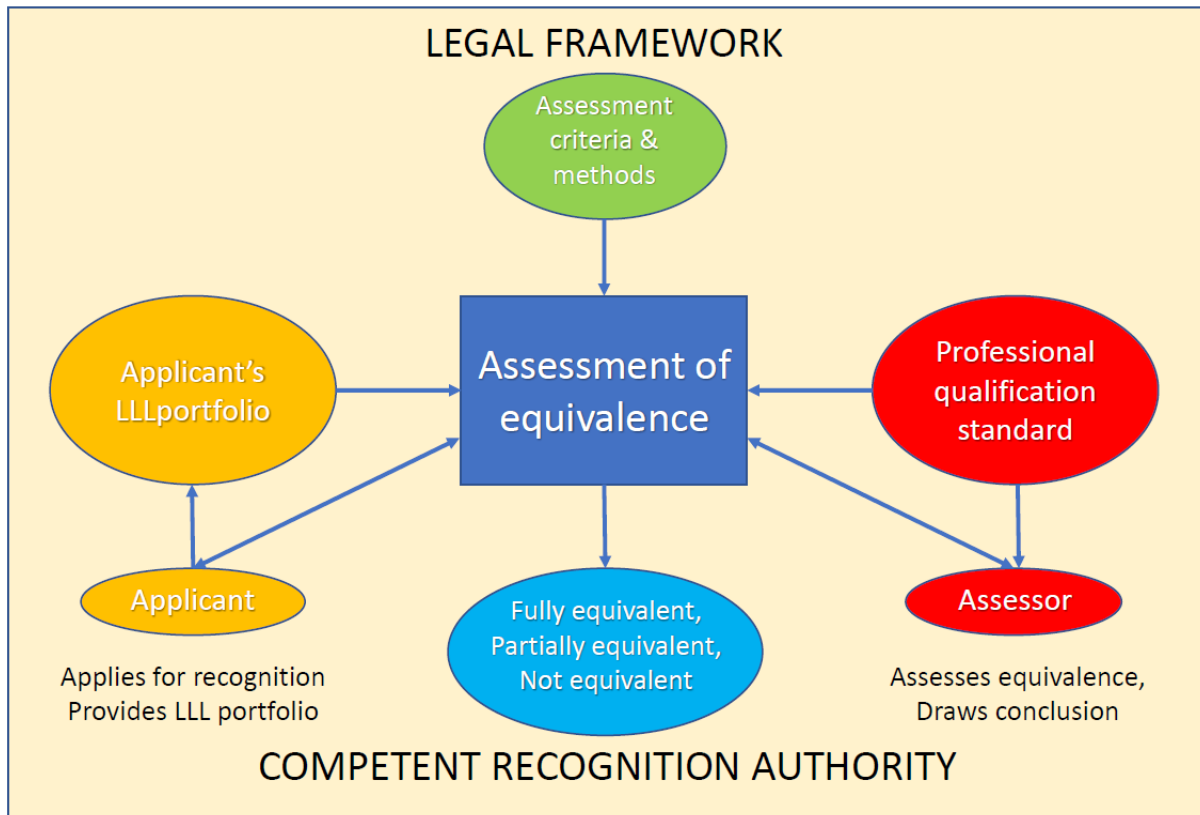


Figure 7. Professional recognition of graduates. Source: developed by Olav Aarna

portfolio establishing that they have completed an academic course, or that they have relevant practical experience and a certificate from a professional body could support an application for a professional qualification.

## 2. Recognition Framework in the EHEA

This chapter describes major legal and regulatory documents concerning academic and professional recognition in the EHEA.

### 2.1. Lisbon Recognition Convention

Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region <https://www.enic-naric.net/the-lisbon-recognition-convention.aspx> usually referred as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) has been jointly drafted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The LRC was adopted at a meeting of national representatives in Lisbon on 8 - 11 April 1997 and until now has been signed by 55 European countries, incl. Ukraine. The LRC is the key legal instrument for recognition of qualifications across UNESCO's Europe and North America Region.

The LRC aims to ensure that holders of a qualification from a signatory country can have that qualification recognised in another. The key points of the LRC are:

Holders of qualifications issued in one country shall have adequate access to an assessment of these qualifications in another country.

No discrimination shall be made in this respect on any ground such as the applicant's gender, race, colour, disability, language, religion, political opinion, national, ethnic or social origin.

The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the body undertaking the assessment.

Each country shall recognise qualifications – whether for access to higher education, for periods of study or for higher education degrees – as similar to the corresponding qualifications in its own system unless it can show that there are substantial differences between its own qualifications and the qualifications for which recognition is sought.

Recognition of a higher education qualification issued in another country shall have one or more of the following consequences:

Access to further higher education studies, including relevant examinations and preparations for the doctorate, on the same conditions as candidates from the country in which recognition is sought;

The use of an academic title, subject to the laws and regulations of the country in which recognition is sought;

In addition, recognition may facilitate access to the labour market<sup>10</sup>.

All countries shall develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

All countries shall provide information on the institutions and programmes they consider as belonging to their higher education systems.

All countries shall appoint a national information centre, one important task of which is to offer advice on the recognition of foreign qualifications to students, graduates, employers, higher education institutions and other interested parties or persons.

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<sup>10</sup> Access to regulated professions is not covered by the Convention.

All countries shall encourage their higher education institutions to issue the Diploma Supplement to their students in order to facilitate recognition.

The Explanatory Report to the LRC can serve as a comprehensive source of explanations and comments to the articles of the convention [https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Explanatory\\_Report\\_LRC.pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Explanatory_Report_LRC.pdf).

The definitions of main terms used in the LRC are presented in Annex 1. This document also uses these terms (access, admission, assessment, qualification, competent recognition authority etc.) in the same meaning.

Two bodies, namely the Committee of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region and the European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Mobility and Recognition (the ENIC Network) are to oversee, promote and facilitate the implementation of the LRC. The Committee is responsible for promoting the application of the Convention and overseeing its implementation. To this end, it can adopt, by a majority of the Parties, recommendations, declarations, protocols and models of good practice to guide the competent authorities of the Parties. Before making its decisions, the Committee seeks the opinion of the ENIC Network. The ENIC Network and the European Union network NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) are international networks created for facilitating the transparent and fair recognition of educational qualifications obtained abroad and for promoting academic and professional mobility (<https://enic-naric.net/index.aspx?s=n&r=ena&d=legal>).

The LRC text dates back to 1997. Obviously, developments within higher education since then are not reflected in the LRC text. One of the most notable changes in higher education is the paradigm shift from a focus on learning inputs to outputs in terms of **learning outcomes**. Another important development is implementation of national and overarching qualifications frameworks in Europe and globally (see also section 1.4). In this respect the Recommendation on the Use of Qualifications Frameworks in the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications [https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/LRC Subsidiary Text on the Use of QFs ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/LRC_Subsidiary_Text_on_the_Use_of_QFs_ENGLISH.pdf) has been adopted providing recommendations for using national and overarching qualifications frameworks to simplify recognition of foreign qualifications. The Recommendation also introduces five key elements (attributes) of a qualification in recognition: **level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile** (see Annex 2).

## 2.2. Recognition of professional qualifications

Any national of a Member State of the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland has the right to work, to seek work, to set up business or to provide services in any other Member State.

The **Directive 2013/55/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013** <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A32013L0055> is in place to aid mobility between Member States of the EU, EEA and Switzerland. It provides for **automatic recognition** for a limited number of professions based on harmonised minimum training requirements (sectoral professions), and a general system for the **recognition of evidence of training and automatic recognition of professional experience**. The Directive works on the principle that a qualified professional in one Member State is qualified to exercise the same profession in another Member State.

The basic principle of the directive is the recognition of a foreign qualification, but every host country has the right to implement the necessary regulations and procedures to reach that goal. There is a great need for professional recognition, since the requirements for the same profession in different countries may vary. In the case of significant differences there is the possibility to implement

compensation mechanisms, for example, an aptitude test or an adaptation period, which enable an assessment of the knowledge, skills and abilities of the applicant for working in a regulated profession.

In order to work in a regulated profession with foreign qualifications one must apply for the recognition of these qualifications by a competent authority. Information about regulated professions, competent authorities and application procedures, etc., in a certain country is provided by contact points.

### 2.3. Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The Council of European Union **Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning**<sup>11</sup> (20 December 2012/ C 398/01 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN)) is meant to harmonise the efforts of the Member-States for developing a robust and consistent system of VNFIL in the European Union, aimed to support the individuals getting recognition of their competences, irrespective the way they acquired them.

This Recommendation provides the following elements in arrangements for the VNFIL, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with his/her needs:

- a) IDENTIFICATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- b) DOCUMENTATION of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- c) ASSESSMENT of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- d) CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through nonformal and informal learning in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.

The Recommendation suggests the following principles in arrangements for the VNFIL, whilst taking into consideration national, regional and/or local, as well as sectoral needs and characteristics:

- a) the validation arrangements are linked to national qualifications frameworks and are in line with the European Qualifications Framework;
- b) information and guidance on the benefits of, and opportunities for validation, as well as on the relevant procedures, are available to individuals and organisations;
- c) disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment, are particularly likely to benefit from the validation arrangements, since validation can increase their participation in lifelong learning and their access to the labour market;
- d) individuals who are unemployed or at risk of unemployment have the opportunity, in accordance with national legislation and specificities, to undergo a 'skills audit' aimed at identifying their knowledge, skills and competences within a reasonable period of time, ideally within six months of an identified need;
- e) the VNFIL is supported by appropriate guidance and counselling and is readily accessible;
- f) transparent quality assurance measures in line with existing quality assurance frameworks are in place that support reliable, valid and credible assessment methodologies and tools;

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<sup>11</sup> In the EU documents validation of non-formal and informal learning is used more or less as synonymous to RPL (see also Annex 2).



- g) provision is made for the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process across all relevant sectors;
- h) qualifications or, where applicable, parts of qualifications obtained by means of the validation of nonformal and informal learning experiences comply with agreed standards that are either the same as, or equivalent to, the standards for qualifications obtained through formal education programmes;
- i) the use of Union transparency tools, such as the Europass framework and Youthpass, is promoted in order to facilitate the documentation of learning outcomes;
- j) synergies exist between validation arrangements and credit systems applicable in the formal education and training system, such as ECTS and ECVET.

The Recommendation also suggests promote the involvement in the development and implementation of the elements and principles of VNFIL all relevant stakeholders, such as employers, trade unions, chambers of industry, commerce and skilled crafts, national entities involved in the process of recognition of professional qualifications, employment services, youth organisations, youth workers, education and training providers, and civil society organisations. To foster participation in this process:

- a) employers, youth organisations and civil society organisations should promote and facilitate the identification and documentation of learning outcomes acquired at work or in voluntary activities, using relevant Union transparency tools such as those developed under the Europass framework and Youthpass;
- b) education and training providers should facilitate access to formal education and training on the basis of learning outcomes acquired in non-formal and informal settings and, if appropriate and possible, award exemptions and/or credits for relevant learning outcomes acquired in such settings.

Coordination on validation arrangements between stakeholders in the education, training, employment and youth sectors, as well as between those in other relevant policy areas should be promoted.

Although the Recommendation is not binding even for the EU member states, following the principles stipulated in the Recommendation are highly recommendable also for Ukraine. The Recommendation is implemented in the EU using the Open Coordination Method.

#### 2.4. European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning

The European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was originally established by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU in the [Recommendation of 23 April 2008](#). On 22 May 2017 the Council adopted a revised EQF recommendation (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ceed970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1>) replacing the Recommendation of 2008. Under the new Recommendation Member States committed themselves to further develop the EQF and make it more effective in facilitating the understanding of national, international and third-country qualifications by employers, workers and learners. In addition to the 28 EU Member States another 11 countries work towards implementing the EQF, namely Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (European Economic Area countries), Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey (candidate countries), Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo and Switzerland (potential candidate countries). The Recommendation is implemented in the EU using the Open Coordination Method.

The EQF helps to compare national qualifications systems and enables communication among them. The core of the EQF are [eight common European reference levels](#), which are described in learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and responsibility and autonomy. This makes it more understandable what a learner with a qualification related to the EQF knows, understands and is able to do. This approach enables to compare all types and levels of qualifications including qualifications from

higher education, vocational education and training and general education, but also qualifications awarded by the private sector and international organisations. Level 1 presents the lowest level of proficiency, level 8 the highest. In principle all possible ways of learning can lead to the learning outcomes of a particular level, including the learning taking place in non-formal and informal contexts. The EQF is closely related to the qualifications framework for the EHEA: the two frameworks are compatible and their implementation is coordinated at national and European level.

The Recommendation also stipulates:

- Criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF;
- Quality assurance principles for qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF.

Currently 34 countries have referenced their NQF to the EQF. Many countries have used the opportunity to combine the EQF referencing with the Bologna self-certification process.

The EQF Recommendation invites the EU Member States to reference national qualifications frameworks or systems to the EQF in particular by referencing their qualification levels to the eight levels of the EQF. Referencing is based on EQF referencing criteria, which are included in the revised Recommendation. [National referencing reports](#), based on extensive national consultations and reviewed by international experts, are presented to the EQF Advisory Group which endorses them if they satisfy the EQF referencing criteria. After referencing countries publish their [referencing reports](#) on this portal, taking into account the comments received from the EQF Advisory Group. After this initial referencing Member States and other countries participating in the EQF are recommended to review and update, when relevant, the referencing of the levels of the national qualifications frameworks or systems to the levels of the EQF. Once national qualifications levels are referenced to the EQF all newly issued qualification documents by the competent authorities (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements), and/or registers of qualifications should in principle contain a clear reference to the appropriate EQF level. **This will make** it much easier for learners, workers and employers to understand and compare qualifications and will also make **cross-border recognition easier**.

At European level, the EQF Advisory Group ensures that the EQF is implemented in a transparent, trustworthy and coherent way across Europe. It brings together representatives from national authorities and European representatives of social partners and other stakeholders. European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) and the European Training Foundation (ETF), as European Agencies, play an important role in supporting the implementation of the EQF.

EU Member states and other countries participating in the EQF have the possibility to set up EQF National Coordination Points, which coordinate implementation of the EQF at national level. Mostly these coordination points also run the national qualifications framework.

## 2.5. Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA

**Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)** [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf). ESG, are the basis for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). They are one of the main achievements of the Bologna Process and its follow-up structure, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) in the past decade.

The ESG provides standards and guidelines for quality assurance on three levels:

- Internal quality assurance in HEIs,
- External quality assurance, e.g. by national quality assurance agencies,

- Quality assurance of quality assurance agencies.

The ESG are not standards for quality, nor do they prescribe how the quality assurance processes are implemented, but they provide guidance, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education. The ESG should be considered in a broader context that also includes qualifications frameworks, ECTS and diploma supplement that also contribute to promoting the transparency and mutual trust in higher education in the EHEA.

The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation. In addition, institutions have policies and processes to ensure and improve the quality of their other activities, such as research and governance. The ESG apply to all higher education offered in the EHEA regardless of the mode of study or place of delivery. Thus, the ESG are also applicable to all higher education including transnational and cross-border provision. In this document the term “programme” refers to higher education in its broadest sense, including that which is not part of a programme leading to a formal degree.

### 3. Some conclusions from the country reports

The QUARSU project involved four partners from the EU: Estonia, Ireland, Poland and Portugal. Although being all also members of the EHEA, these countries have different history, practices and experience in implementing RPL (see Annexes ...-...).

Seems, that the level of RPL adoption in the HEIs of a country depends on the level of RPL culture. The RPL culture as a component of HEIs organisational culture. Organisational culture is an emergent phenomenon, i.e. .... . Despite emergent nature of this phenomenon, it's development can be to certain extent promoted both internally and externally.



## Annex 1. Recognition types (cases) to be considered in QUARSU

Case No	Recognition type (case)	Sub-cases to be considered	Aim, target group, questions to be answered during recognition process	EHEA rules and practice to be studied and reflected within WP1.1
1	2	3	4	5
<b>Academic Recognition (recognition for academic purposes)</b>				
1	Recognition of academic qualifications	a) foreign academic qualifications (qualifications awarded outside Ukraine)  b) academic qualifications which are not included in NQF	<p><b>Aims</b> Access to study in HEIs Admission to study in HEI</p> <p><b>Target groups</b> People who already got academic qualifications and want to enter another study programme in HEIs. (another level or another field of study / specialization)</p> <p><b>Questions to be answered during recognition process in HEI:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Was qualification awarded legally?</li> <li>- What is the level of qualification in EQF and NQF?</li> <li>- What is the field of education of completed programme? Is field of completed programme is equal / related to some field (specialization) in national classification of education?</li> </ul> <p><b>Summary:</b> Does holder of qualification have rights to enter to study programme or to be</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is recognition of foreign qualifications and qualifications not included in NQF permitted for HEI? Is it actually performed by EU universities? Legal base.</li> <li>- Are special national or institutional provisions introduced? Examples.</li> <li>- How legality and validity of qualification can be checked and confirmed? Methodology, procedure.</li> <li>- How universities define / recognize the level of foreign qualification and compare it with NQF? How universities define / recognize the level of qualification not included in NQF and compare it with NQF?</li> <li>- Which tools are applied? Are special national or institutional provisions introduced?</li> <li>- Is field of education noted in Diploma (Diploma Supplement) compared with national fields (specialties, specializations) for recognition purpose? If Yes, how such comparison is conducted? Are special national or institutional provisions introduced?</li> <li>- What is the output of recognition procedure? How it is documented? Examples.</li> </ul>

			employed in HEI?	
				<p><b>Special attention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognition for access to study &amp; admission to study (difference in procedures)</li> <li>- Quality assurance and sustainability of recognition – how it is provided?</li> <li>- Specific aspects of recognition of level 5 (short cycle) – if applicable</li> </ul>
2	Recognition of prior learning (RPL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) formal learning</li> <li>b) non-formal and in-formal learning</li> <li>c) <i>prior professional training</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Aim</b></p> <p>Partial fulfilment of a study programme in Ukrainian HEI:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Credits transfer</li> <li>- Credits awarding</li> </ul> <p><b>Target groups</b></p> <p>People, who are studying in or entering HEIs, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- already completed formal HE programme and got some competencies and LOs, or</li> <li>- already achieve some competencies and LOs in non-formal and/or in-formal contexts, <i>or by professional training.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Questions to be answered during recognition process in HEI:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What are the learning outcomes (LOs) achieved by person seeking RPL? (<i>different contexts to be considered – formal, non-formal, in-formal learning, and awarded professional qualification</i>)</li> <li>- Are LOs already achieved / <i>acquired</i> by a person <i>equal or</i> compatible with LOs of “current” programme in HEI? (<i>for possible appropriate credits transfer or credits</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Legal base.</li> <li>- Are special national or institutional provisions on Recognition of prior learning (RPL) introduced?</li> <li>- Is recognition of non-formal and in-formal prior learning actually performed by EU HEIs? For which purposes?</li> <li>- How are programme LOs and course LOs achieved by a person defined / recognized and specified? Which tools are applied? Examples. (<i>cases: formal, non-formal, and in-formal learning; awarded professional qualification</i>)</li> <li>- How are LOs achieved by a person compared with programme LOs and course LOs of “current” programme? Which tools are applied? Examples.</li> <li>- How RPL is applied in a case if specification of prior LOs is not accessible? Is it possible? Are special examinations applied for defining and recognition of LOs achieved by person?</li> <li>- Can professional (occupational) qualification be accepted as formal evidence of acquired by a person competencies and LOs?</li> </ul>

			<p><i>awarding</i>)</p> <p><b>Summary:</b> Which LOs achieved/ <i>acquired</i> by a person can be recognized, and which ECTS credits can be transferred or awarded?</p>	<p>Does it really work in HEIs? Are specific national or institutional provisions introduced?</p> <p><b>Special attention</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Microcredentials – how they are recognized?</li> <li>- Recognition of LOs achieved at level 5 within first cycle programmes;</li> <li>- RPL at national level (if applicable)</li> <li>- RPL within doctoral programmes (if applicable)</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Recognition</b>				
3	Professional recognition of graduates	<p>a) Professional recognition of (academic) qualifications awarded by Ukrainian HEIs</p> <p>b) Recognition of professional competency of graduate(s) by authorized body and/or employers (<i>professional certification of graduates / awarding professional qualifications, if applicable</i>)</p>	<p><b>Aim</b> Enhancing employability of graduates. Support of employment of graduates within appropriate occupations</p> <p><b>Target group</b> HEI graduates</p> <p><b>Questions to be considered by HEI for professional recognition of graduates:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How to ensure appropriate professional competency of student / graduate?</li> <li>- Does student / graduate meet related professional standard of competency? How to organize assessment of professional competency and professional certification of graduates by authorized body and/or employers in HEIs?</li> </ul> <p><b>Summary:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does study programme ensure appropriate professional competence?</li> <li>- Does graduate meet the requirements of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How HEIs ensure appropriate professional competency of graduates? Is student's professional competency assessed within study programme? Examples.</li> <li>- Is professional certification (awarding professional qualifications) in focus of HEIs? Is it performed by HEIs or with HEIs support? Examples.</li> <li>- Are specific national or institutional provisions on professional certification of graduates introduced? Examples.</li> </ul>



			professional qualification (requirements for professional certification)?	
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## Annex 2. Definitions of main terms

For the purposes of the LRC, the main terms used have the following meaning:

### **Access (to higher education)**

The right of qualified candidates to apply and to be considered for admission to higher education.

### **Admission (to higher education institutions and programmes)**

The act of, or system for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education at a given institution and/or a given programme.

### **Assessment (of institutions or programmes)**

The process for establishing the educational quality of a higher education institution or programme.

### **Assessment (of individual qualifications)**

The written appraisal or evaluation of an individual's foreign qualifications by a competent body.

### **Competent recognition authority**

A body officially charged with making binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications.

### **Higher education**

All types of courses of study, or sets of courses of study, training or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognised by the relevant authorities of a Party as belonging to its higher education system.

### **Higher education institution**

An establishment providing higher education and recognised by the competent authority of a Party as belonging to its system of higher education.

### **Higher education programme**

A course of study recognised by the competent authority of a Party as belonging to its system of higher education, and the completion of which provides the student with a higher education qualification.

### **Period of study**

Any component of a higher education programme which has been evaluated and documented and, while not a complete programme of study in itself, represents a significant acquisition of knowledge or skill.

### **Qualification**

#### **A. Higher education qualification**

Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of a higher education programme.

#### **B. Qualification giving access to higher education**

Any diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of an education programme and giving the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to higher education (cf. the definition of access).

### **Recognition**

A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities.

## **Requirement**

### **A. General requirements**

Conditions that must in all cases be fulfilled for access to higher education, or to a given level thereof, or for the award of a higher education qualification at a given level.

### **B. Specific requirements**

Conditions that must be fulfilled, in addition to the general requirements, in order to gain admission to a particular higher education programme, or for the award of a specific higher education qualification in a particular field of study.

## Annex 3. Definitions of basic terms from the Recommendation on validation of non-formal and informal learning

For the purposes of this Recommendation, the following definitions apply:

- a) **formal learning** means learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training and higher education;
- b) **non-formal learning** means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured on-line learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public;
- c) **informal learning** means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child);
- d) **open educational resources (OER)** means digitised materials offered freely and openly for educators, students and self-learners to use and reuse for teaching, learning and research; it includes learning content, software tools to develop, use and distribute content, and implementation resources such as open licences; OER also refers to accumulated digital assets that can be adjusted and which provide benefits without restricting the possibilities for others to enjoy them;
- e) a **skills audit** means a process aimed at identifying and analysing the knowledge, skills and competences of an individual, including his or her aptitudes and motivations in order to define a career project and/or plan a professional reorientation or training project; the aim of a skills audit is to help the individual analyse his/her career background, to self-assess his/her position in the labour environment and to plan a career pathway, or in some cases to prepare for the validation of non-formal or informal learning outcomes;
- f) a **qualification** means a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards;
- g) **learning outcomes** means statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences;
- h) a **national qualifications framework** means an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specified levels of learning achieved, which aims to integrate and coordinate national qualifications subsystems and improve the transparency, access, progression and quality of qualifications in relation to the labour market and civil society;
- i) **validation** means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases:
  - 1. IDENTIFICATION through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
  - 2. DOCUMENTATION to make visible the individual's experiences;

3. a formal ASSESSMENT of these experiences; and
  4. CERTIFICATION of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification;
- j) **recognition of prior learning** means the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.

## Annex 4. RECOMMENDATION ON THE USE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN QUALIFICATIONS

[https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/LRC Subsidiary Text on the Use of QFs ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/LRC_Subsiary_Text_on_the_Use_of_QFs_ENGLISH.pdf)

### Scope and General Considerations

1. The Recommendation focuses on the use of qualifications frameworks as important information and transparency tools in the recognition of higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education.
2. The Recommendation takes account of the fact that, from a lifelong learning perspective, qualifications frameworks can also facilitate the recognition of prior learning, since qualifications frameworks describe qualifications in terms of learning outcomes independently from learning paths. It also takes account of the fact that qualifications frameworks can be used to facilitate access to the labour market.
3. The Recommendation demonstrates ways in which qualifications frameworks may be helpful in establishing similarities between foreign qualifications and relevant qualifications within the education system in which recognition is sought, and whether or not there are substantial differences between qualifications.
4. The fact that not all countries, or indeed all signatories to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, have national qualifications frameworks should not be an impediment to recognizing qualifications from such countries. Likewise many older qualifications may not be placed in a qualifications framework even if the country in question has now developed one.
5. National Qualifications Frameworks facilitate recognition especially when they have been linked in a transparent and comparative way – through self-certification and referencing – to the overarching frameworks, such as QF-EHEA and EQF-LLL.
6. While the existence of a NQF alone does not lead to “automatic recognition”, the positioning of qualifications within the NQF of the awarding country and their relation to one or more overarching frameworks gives important information to facilitate the recognition processes.

### Recommendations

1. The competent recognition authorities, and the ENIC Network should develop a common understanding on how to use national, European or other overarching qualifications frameworks for the purpose of facilitating the fair recognition of qualifications and should identify the opportunities and challenges they present.
2. Qualifications frameworks should be used to make it easier for competent recognition authorities to assess foreign qualifications.
3. Qualifications frameworks should be used while considering the five key elements in recognition: **level, learning outcomes, quality, workload and profile**. However, qualifications frameworks provide limited information to support the recognition process when it comes to the profile of a qualification.
4. The following principles should apply to assure the effective use of qualifications frameworks in recognition practice:

a. Level

- i. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is, as a general rule, no need for the competent recognition authority to investigate the level of qualifications further;
- ii. In the case that qualifications have been referenced/self-certified towards the same level in overarching frameworks, they should be seen as broadly compatible;
- iii. When level discrepancies occur, qualification specific information including the Diploma Supplement or other documents should be used. In these cases, the formal rights the qualification in the awarding country should be taken into account.

*b. Learning outcomes*

- i. The learning outcomes of National Qualifications Frameworks and of overarching qualifications frameworks are generic and provide a reference point for recognition;
- ii. In cases where the learning outcomes provided by the qualifications frameworks are insufficient for recognition purposes, the more detailed descriptions of learning outcomes provided by institutions should be used. The description of learning outcomes in the Diploma Supplement or other documents is useful for recognition purposes.

*c. Quality*

- i. A transparent link between recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance should be established;
- ii. If a National Qualifications Framework has been self-certified or referenced, there is an assumption that the individual qualifications included in the framework by the competent authority are quality assured. Therefore, as a general rule there is no need for the recognition authority to investigate the quality of the qualification.

*d. Workload*

While recognising that qualifications should as far as possible be assessed on the basis of learning outcomes, competent recognition authorities may also be guided in their assessment by the workload learners are assumed to require in order to obtain the given qualification. This is normally expressed as credits and indicates the typical workload expected to achieve the learning outcomes associated with a qualification.

## Annex 5. Case of Estonia

### Higher education system in Estonia

Higher education system in Estonia follows the principles agreed upon in the framework of the Bologna process. General description of the system is an obligatory part of the Diploma Supplement ([http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/File/Regulation\\_Correspondence\\_of\\_qualifications.pdf](http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/File/Regulation_Correspondence_of_qualifications.pdf)).

The requirement for access to higher education is secondary education, certified by *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* (Upper Secondary School Leaving Certificate), *Lõputunnistus kutsekeskhariduse omandamise kohta* (Certificate of Vocational Secondary Education) the corresponding qualifications of earlier education systems, and foreign qualifications giving access to higher education. The *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* is issued after 12 years of schooling (9 years of basic education and 3 years of general upper secondary education). In order to complete general upper secondary education it is necessary to take national examinations certified with the national examination certificate. A higher education institution (HEI) may introduce further admission requirements, such as entrance examinations, minimum scores of national examinations, interviews, etc.

Student workload is measured in credits. As of academic year 2009/2010, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) has officially been in use. One ECTS credit corresponds to 26 hours of work by a student. The workload of one academic year is 1560 hours, which corresponds to 60 ECTS credits.

There are two types of Bologna first cycle study programmes:

- Professional higher education programmes (the qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *rakenduskõrghariduse diplom*),
- Bachelors programmes (the qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *bakalaureus*),

Both granting access to master's type programmes (the qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *magister*).

Access to master's programmes can be restricted by the requirement of Bologna first cycle qualification from the same field of study, e.g. social sciences. The number of master's programmes with open access (no restriction for previous field of studies) is increasing. All master's programmes grant access to doctoral programmes (the qualification awarded upon completion of the programme is *doctor*).

### National Qualifications Framework

Creation of the Estonian Qualifications Framework (EstQF) started in 2005, when the minister of education and research established a broad-based working group with an assignment to analyse the first draft proposal of the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), the possibilities to link the Estonian five-levels occupational qualifications framework to the EQF, and formulate suggestions about the development of the EstQF. The working group put forward the proposal of creating an 8-level comprehensive national qualifications framework. The proposal was supported by the employers' and employees' organisations, by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, by the Ministry of Social Affairs, and by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. Based on this agreement, another broad-based working group was established by the minister of education and research with the task to draft a new Occupational Qualifications Act, which would stipulate also the EstQF.

An 8-level qualifications framework was established in 2008, with the Occupational Qualifications Act



(<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/521032019015/consolide/current>). The level descriptors of the EstQF are identical to the level descriptors of the EQF. The EstQF is a comprehensive qualifications framework, which includes qualifications awarded by the education and training institutions (general education qualifications, vocational education and training (VET) qualifications, and higher education qualifications), and occupational qualifications awarded by state recognised awarding institutions (professional associations etc.). Occupational qualification means a qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession. Occupational qualifications can be gained through work-based learning, in-service training, and adult education. Some occupational qualifications can be gained also through formal education system.

The creation and implementation of the EstQF is based on the principles for accountability and quality assurance of qualifications laid down by the European Parliament and Council recommendation on establishment of the EQF (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0463+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>)<sup>12</sup>.

Initially referencing of the EstQF to the EQF took place from January 2010 to August 2011. This document is an amended version of the referencing report presented to the EQF Advisory Group in September 2011 and placed into the EQF portal in July 2012. Major reason for revision of the report was adoption of the new VET Institutions Act and new Standard of VET in June 2013. The documents compiled combine the EQF referencing and the Bologna self-certification.

The EstQF consists of four sub-frameworks: for general education qualifications, for VET qualifications, for higher education qualifications and for occupational qualifications (see Figure 1). The steering committee established by the minister of education and research arrived at the conclusion that the referencing of four sub-frameworks of qualifications to the EstQF and referencing it to the EQF follows all the rules, procedures and quality criteria that have been agreed upon in the European Union (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0463+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>).

Table 1 presents the results of assigning the EstQF levels to Estonian formal education qualifications, and examples of occupational qualifications on different levels. The state register of occupational qualifications includes more than 550 occupational qualifications (<http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsereregister>). Examples of occupational qualification standards in English can be found on the Estonian Qualifications Authority's (EQA) web page: [http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/tutvustus/kutsestandardid\\_eng](http://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/kutsesysteem/tutvustus/kutsestandardid_eng).

Table 1. Placement of formal education qualifications and occupational qualifications in the EstQF

Formal education qualifications	EstQF levels	Examples of occupational qualifications
Basic education certificate based on curriculum for students with moderate and severe learning disabilities	1	
Basic education certificate based on simplified curriculum Basic education certificate VET qualification certificate, level 2	2	Assistant gardener, Logger
VET qualification certificate, level 3	3	Electronic equipment assembler, Woodworking bench operator

<sup>12</sup> In 2017 the Recommendation was amended (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/cee970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>).

Upper secondary general education certificate Upper secondary VET certificate VET qualification certificate, level 4	4	Harvester operator, Veterinary assistant
VET qualification certificate, level 5	5	Biogas plant operator, Mechatronic-technician
Diploma of Bachelor's degree, Diploma of professional higher education	6	Physiotherapist, Civil Engineer, Applied Architect
Diploma of Master's degree	7	Diploma engineer, Diploma architect
Diploma of Doctoral degree	8	Chartered civil engineer, Chartered architect

## Quality assurance in higher education

**Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA)** is a competence centre in the field of external evaluation of higher and vocational education in Estonia. Key activities of EKKA include **institutional accreditation of higher education institutions** and **quality assessment of their study programme groups**, also **accreditation of study programme groups in VET**.

In Estonia, only institutions of higher education which have passed the evaluation of quality of studies are allowed to provide higher education. As of 2012, studies at the level of higher education may only be conducted if the Government of the Republic has provided the right to conduct studies in this study programme group and at this level of studies. This includes the right to issue state recognised graduation certificates (diplomas).

If an institution of higher education (private, public or state) wishes to apply for the right to conduct studies in a new study programme, it must submit its application with data describing the quality, resources and sustainability of the studies to the Ministry of Education and Research. The application is then proceeded with the help of EKKA. If approved, the right to conduct studies is confirmed with a regulation of the government of the republic in annexes to the standard of higher education. See more at – [initial evaluation of a study programme group](#).

**Institutions of higher education with the right to conduct studies** receive feedback on the management, functioning, studies and research of their institution via the following evaluations:

- [Institutional accreditation](#) is external evaluation which assesses the conformity of the institution's management, work procedure, study and research activities and study and research environment to legislation and the goals and development plan of the institution.
- [Quality assessment of a study programme group](#) is external evaluation which assesses the conformity of study programmes and the studies and developmental activities based on those programmes to legislation, state and international standards and developmental directions with the purpose of providing recommendations to improve the quality of studies.

The Higher Education Act also envisages an annual **thematic assessment** to be conducted.

**External quality assurance of VET** in Estonia is regulated by the [Vocational Educational Institutions Act](#). The quality assurance activities delegated to EKKA have been laid down in the [EKKA Conceptual Framework Document for QA in VET](#).

**The objective of the quality assessment of vocational education is to foster the development of learning-oriented school culture and to increase the reliability of vocational education.**

Quality assessment of vocational education provides an opportunity:

- For the school to get feedback about the quality of the study process and recommendations to develop it and to use the results of an independent external evaluation for the school's strategic management.

- To inform stakeholders (learners, labour market, state, the society in general) about how well vocational education meets the national demands, objectives of development plans, labour market needs and expectations of the learners.

EKKA is in charge of two types of assessment in VET:

1. **Initial assessment and re-assessment of study programme groups** (granting the right to provide instruction in a new group of programmes).
2. **Quality assessment of study programme groups**.

EKKA has developed *Requirements and procedure for accreditation of study programmes in continuing education*, the regulation can be found under [Regulations](#).

In 2018 a two year [project was launched for enhancing the quality of continuing education in Estonia](#).

## Academic recognition of foreign academic qualifications for access to higher education

### Recognition of foreign qualifications

Recognition of foreign qualifications for access to higher education programmes is an everyday practice at Estonian HEIs. In other words, HEIs are competent recognition institutions. Recognition is applied to foreign students seeking admission to study programmes in Estonian HEIs and to Estonian students who have been awarded the respective qualification abroad. The documents can be assessed by HEI or the Estonian Academic Recognition Information Centre (EARIC), which is the Estonian ENIC/NARIC centre (<http://adm.archimedes.ee/enic/en/>, see Annex 4).

The documents of all candidates from the countries outside the European Union are assessed by the EARIC. The final decision about recognition is taken by the HEI. HEI can conduct recognition of foreign qualifications autonomously without seeking confirmation from the EARIC, provided that the HEI has respective competence.

The legal basis for recognition is The Lisbon Recognition Convention (see section 2.1) while Estonia is one out of 55 signatory countries.

Following the Guidelines for National Online Information Systems ([https://adm.archimedes.ee/enic/wp-includes/ms-files.php?file=2019/09/Guidelines\\_National\\_Online\\_Information\\_Systems.pdf](https://adm.archimedes.ee/enic/wp-includes/ms-files.php?file=2019/09/Guidelines_National_Online_Information_Systems.pdf)) the EARIC web site includes the following information:

- Lisbon Recognition Convention;
- Subsidiary texts to the Convention;
- National legislation on recognition and information on general procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications;
- Information on application procedures with application forms, documentation and translation requirements, expected case processing time, appeal procedures;
- Academic and professional recognition;
- National regulations for regulated professions, list of regulated professions and competent recognition bodies and/or national assistance centres for EU Directive 2005/36/EC.

Even though the EARIC has no specific role regarding the recognition of qualifications in regulated professions, it provides information and links to relevant competent authorities (<https://archimedes.ee/enic/en/kutsealane/>).

### Recognition of qualifications not included in NQF

Recognition of qualifications not included in the Estonian NQF is conducted based on the Governmental regulation No 120 of 06.06.2005, which stipulates equivalence between the qualifications not included in the Estonian NQF (incl. the qualifications awarded in the former Soviet Union) and qualifications included in the Estonian NQF ([http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/File/Regulation\\_Correspondence\\_of\\_qualifications.pdf](http://www2.archimedes.ee/enic/File/Regulation_Correspondence_of_qualifications.pdf)).

According to this document the Specialist's Diploma issued in the former USSR corresponds to the degree of *magister* (master's degree), except the diplomas issued by the institutions of higher education within the area of administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union and by the institutions of military higher education. The degrees of *Kandidat nauk* and *Doktor nauk* correspond to the degree of *doktor* (doctoral degree).

No individual validation of applicants' documents is needed. This regulation can be used for academic as well as professional recognition.

### **Assessment and validation procedures**

The EARIC conducts assessment of foreign qualification documents validity following the rules and procedures agreed in the framework of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (see Annex 5).

HEIs in Estonia have the right to assess and validate foreign qualifications based on the Higher Education Act and the Standard of Higher Education (see Annexes 6 and 7). The Standard of Higher Education stipulates the Estonian higher education framework, which has been Bologna self-certified in 2011. HEI establishes the methodology and procedures for assessment and validation of foreign qualifications or more generally for RPL through internal academic regulations (see **Chapter 2**).

HEI may identify the field of study of a foreign qualification if needed, e.g. in case of access to master's or doctoral programme. The EARIC does not assess and validate the field of study or other details of a foreign qualification related to ISCED.

Sustainability and quality of recognition processes at HEIs is assured by competent consultants and assessors who have been specifically trained for these duties. After admission to the European Union we had a special ESF sponsored programme (*LÜKKA*, for 2005-2008) for promoting the quality of higher education in Estonia. During this programme several hundred RPL specialists were trained and a RPL network was established. Academic integrity of persons directly involved in RPL is a question of organisational culture first and foremost.

The RPL processes in HEIs do not have specifically allocated funding. The costs are covered from the resources of academic studies.

### **Diploma and Diploma Supplement**

Diploma Supplement (DS) is compulsory to issue together with every higher education credential awarded on completion of a study-programme that is registered with the Ministry of Education and Research after 1 June 2002. Issuing of DS to earlier graduates is regulated by every HEI independently. The format of the DS corresponds to that recommended by UNESCO and the Council of Europe (<https://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/DS-template-eng.pdf>).

According to the Standard of Higher Education in all higher education diplomas the field of study is indicated (<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/tolkelisa/5240/9201/4013/2.pdf#>).

### **Output of recognition procedure**

As a result of the assessment the EARIC issues a written statement about the correspondence of the level of the foreign qualification to that within Estonian education system, and appropriateness for access to bachelor's, master's or doctorate level studies. It also describes the assessment system used in the respective foreign education system. The centre does not identify the field of study or specialisation. The centre also does not assess and approve the validity of educational documents.

Written statement issued by the Estonian ENIC/NARIC centre can also be used as evidence for partial fulfilment of a study programme (see Chapter 2).

The EARIC can make a recommendation for full recognition, partial recognition or for denial of recognition. In case of partial recognition or denial of recognition the applicant shall be notified in writing of the reasons for the decision, and recommendations for further studies in order to obtain a recognized qualification can be made.

If the recommendation is for partial recognition or to deny recognition, no correspondence to a qualification in the Estonian education system is established.

## Recognition of prior learning for partial fulfilment of a study programme

### Legal framework for RPL

The legal base for RPL in Estonia consists of two legal acts:

- Higher Education Act (see Annex 4),
- Standard of Higher Education (see Annex 5).

Based on the principles of RPL stipulated in the Standard of Higher Education the HEI develop their own regulations and procedures for different types of RPL (see examples in Annex 8).

### Validation of non-formal and informal learning by HEIs

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL as the terms in the EU legal framework) is an everyday practice at Estonian HEIs. VNFIL can be used for:

- Partial fulfilment of a study programme or a course,
- Partial fulfilment of admission requirements to Master and Doctoral programmes.

**What is the procedure and what direct and indirect evidence are used to confirm *partial fulfilment of a study programme or a course/ partial fulfilment of admission requirements to Master and Doctoral programmes?***

### The process of recognising programme or course LOs achieved by a person

From the applicants perspective the process consists of six steps:

- 2) Familiarizing yourself with the aims and principles of RPL.
- 3) Counselling and the applicant's self-analysis.
- 4) Composing the application.
- 5) Submitting the documents.
- 6) Assessing the application.
- 7) Informing the applicant of the decision and feedback.

Step 5 is conducted by an assessment committee who analyses the documents (evidence) submitted and takes a decision:

- Fully recognise,
- Partially recognise,
- Refuse.

Assessment committee takes a decision based on documents. In case of partial recognition additional examination or need for additional evidence can be indicated.

In case of VNFIL the number of credits depends on the ECTS value of the target programme or course and the proportion of LOs validated. No marks are attached in that case.

Examples of the respective regulations and procedures can be found in Annex 8.

## Comparing LOs acquired by a person with programme or course LOs

The main method used is content analysis.

## RPL in case prior LOs are not accessible

RPL is possible even in case prior LOs are not accessible (are not explicitly defined in the documents provided). The assessment committee can still assess the compliance of evidence provided to the LOs of a study programme or course. In case of partial recognition special examination can be applied.

## Professional (occupational) qualification as formal confirmation of acquired LOs

In principle, a professional (occupational) qualification and even proven professional experience can be accepted as a confirmation of acquired LOs. However, this experience is currently quite limited.

## Professional recognition of graduates

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC serves as an assistance centre that provides information about recognition of professional qualifications (<https://archimedes.ee/enic/en/kutsealane/>).

The aim of the Estonian **Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act** entered into force on 1 January 2001 is to promote the free movement of people and to guarantee that professional education and work experience obtained abroad is recognised in Estonia. Professional recognition is a procedure that enables a person with a foreign professional qualification to be admitted to a regulated profession or professional activity in Estonia. The system of professional recognition is not only valuable for foreigners, but also for Estonians, who have studied or worked in a foreign country.

An important aspect of professional recognition is **professional recognition of academic qualifications** (especially bachelor's degree and master's degree) awarded by HEIs.

## Assuring and assessing professional competence of graduates

Curriculum development in Estonian HEIs is guided by two standards:

- Standard of Higher Education (STE),
- Occupational qualification standards (OQS) if available.

The STE provides generalised (context free) LOs for four types of higher education study programmes. OQS for EU regulated professions are provided by **Directive 2005/36**. The examples of

OQS can be found on the EQA (*SA Kutsekoda*) web site <https://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/occupational-qualifications-system-2/>.

An OQS is used for defining the intended LOs (ILOs) of a study programme. In other words, the performance indicators from an OQS are translated into the programme ILOs. This means that student's professional competence is assessed within a study programme provided, that the programme implementation follows the constructive alignment principle.

### **Professional certification (awarding professional qualifications) by HEIs or with HEIs support**

According to the Occupational Qualifications Act (Professions Act<sup>13</sup> <https://www.kutsekoda.ee/en/occupational-qualifications-system-2/>):

- An occupational qualification shall be awarded upon the completion of studies by making a notation on the diploma supplement issued to the person if:  
1) the person has completed his or her studies of a regulated profession specified in the directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the recognition of professional qualifications (OJ L 255, 30.9.2005, pp 22–142), and  
2) the curriculum complies with the professional standard and is nationally recognised.
- An occupational qualification shall be awarded to a person upon registration in the register of occupational qualifications and by a notation made on the diploma supplement upon the completion of studies by an higher education institution with the right to award occupational qualification and by a notation made on the leaving certificate upon the completion of vocational training and issue of a occupational qualification certificate to the person having received the occupational qualification, at his or her request.

A HEI receives the right to award occupational qualification from a respective occupational qualifications committee (sectoral committee) after an awarding body responsible for the group of occupation qualifications has evaluate whether the curriculum of an educational institution applying for the right to award professions elected without a competition through the professional qualifications committee complies with the professional standard and approves the membership of the final examination, final paper or professional examination assessment committee of an educational institution in order to ensure the involvement of social partners. The right to award an occupational qualification is granted to a study programme.

Occupational qualification is awarded to all graduates of the programme. The logic is fairly simple. If the programme LOs include performance indicators of an occupational qualification standard, this means that the graduates have achieved all expected LOs (and probably something more as well).

### **National or institutional provisions on professional certification of graduates**

Professional (occupational) certification of graduates is part of Estonian occupational qualifications system as described in sections 3.1 and 3.2. In case of regulated profession no special procedures are applicable compared with non-regulated professions if the legal act does not stipulate otherwise.

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<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the official translation uses inappropriate and sometimes misleading terminology.

## Annex E1. The Estonian Academic Recognition Information Centre

<http://adm.archimedes.ee/enic/en/>

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC (Academic Recognition Information Centre) is a subdivision of **Archimedes Foundation**. It belongs to the international networks of **ENIC and NARIC**.

The Council of Europe and UNESCO network ENIC (European Network of National Information Centres on Academic Recognition and Mobility) and the European Union network NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) are international networks created for facilitating the transparent and fair recognition of educational qualifications obtained abroad and for promoting academic and professional mobility.

### Academic recognition

Academic recognition is the recognition of a foreign qualification for the purpose of further studies.

In academic recognition the evaluators mainly seek to assess whether the applicant is capable of continuing studies at the chosen level.

The need for the academic recognition may rise when a person holds a diploma of the home country and seeks admission to a further stage of studies in a foreign country or seeks admission to further studies in the home country after completion of the previous stage or period of studies abroad.

In principle, academic recognition is sought only for admission to further studies. Some applicants, however, choose to receive a statement of academic recognition before seeking employment in the professions where recognition of a foreign degree/diploma, is not officially required (i.e. in non-regulated professions). This kind of recognition (**academic recognition for professional purposes**) helps employers to understand what home country's qualification can be compared to the foreign one.

**General procedures and criteria for the evaluation of foreign higher education qualifications and qualifications giving access to higher education** (document in the pdf-format)

**Legal framework for academic recognition**

**National Action Plan for Recognition** (document in the pdf-format)

### Professional recognition

Any national of a Member State of the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland has the right to work, to seek work, to set up business or to provide services in any other Member State.

**Directive 2005/36** is in place to aid mobility between Member States of the EU, EEA and Switzerland. This directive applies to regulated professions including sectoral and general systems. The Directive works on the principle that a qualified professional in one Member State is qualified to exercise the same profession in another Member State.

The basic principle of the directive is the recognition of a foreign qualification, but every host country has the right to implement the necessary regulations and procedures to reach that goal. There is a great need for professional recognition, since the requirements for the same profession in different countries may vary. In the case of significant differences there is the possibility to implement compensation mechanisms, for example, an aptitude test or an adaptation period, which enable an



assessment of the knowledge, skills and abilities of the applicant for working in a regulated profession.

In order to work in a regulated profession with foreign qualifications one must apply for the recognition of these qualifications by a competent authority. Information about regulated professions, competent authorities and application procedures, etc., in a certain country is provided by contact points. The Estonian ENIC/NARIC serves as an assistance centre that provides information about recognition of professional qualifications.

## **National contact points for professional recognition in the EU member states, the EEA countries and Switzerland**

### **Recognition of professional qualifications in Estonia**

The aim of the [Recognition of Foreign Professional Qualifications Act](#) entered into force on 1 January 2001 is to promote the free movement of people and to guarantee that professional education and work experience obtained abroad is recognised in Estonia. Professional recognition is a procedure that enables a person with a foreign professional qualification to be admitted to a regulated profession or professional activity in Estonia. The system of professional recognition is not only valuable for foreigners, but also for Estonians, who have studied or worked in a foreign country.

### **[Regulated professions and competent authorities in Estonia](#)**

## **Higher education system**

### **[Legal framework](#)**

### **[Types of higher education institutions](#)**

### **[Administration and academic staff](#)**

### **[Higher education cycles and qualifications](#)**

### **[Grading and credit system](#)**

### **[Quality assurance](#)**

### **[Higher education qualifications of the former systems](#)**

## **Access to higher education**

### **[Access qualifications](#)**

### **[Access and admission](#)**

## Annex E2. GENERAL PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA FOR THE EVALUATION OF FOREIGN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS GIVING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC (Academic Recognition Information Centre) evaluates foreign qualifications according to the Government of the Republic of Estonia Regulation No 89 of 6 April 2006 “Criteria and Procedures for Assessment and Academic Recognition of Foreign Qualifications and for Use of Title of Qualification Granted in Foreign Education System”.

In assessment and academic recognition the Estonian ENIC/NARIC is guided by the purposes and tasks of the NARIC Network of the European Commission and the ENIC Network of the Council of Europe and UNESCO and the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon, 1997) and the subsidiary documents.

The comparability of qualifications granted on the territory of the USSR before 20 August 1991 is established by the Government of the Republic of Estonia Regulation No 120. The qualifications not included in the regulation are assessed by the Estonian ENIC/NARIC.

### 1. The applicant for assessment

Anyone who holds a foreign higher education qualification, a qualification giving access to higher education or a credential certifying completion of a part of a postsecondary education programme at a foreign or international education institution may apply for assessment.

The request for assessment may also be submitted by an employer, by a higher education institution or by any other institution to which a foreign education credential has been presented.

### 2. The purpose of assessment

In the process of assessment a foreign qualification shall be compared to the qualifications in the Estonian education system.

The purpose of assessment is to establish a correspondence between the foreign qualification and a qualification within Estonian current system of education. The correspondence shall not be established if the qualification is not recognized in the country where it was granted or if it cannot be recognized in Estonia for some other reason.

The outcome of assessment enables the Estonian ENIC/NARIC to advise higher education institutions and employers and to make recommendations on:

- access to studies at the higher education institutions belonging to Estonian education system;
- access to the labour market in Estonia for people who have acquired their education in a foreign education system.

### 3. Required documents

#### 3.1. If the holder of the qualification seeks assessment

Required documents:

- application (in Estonian, English or Russian);
- personal identity document;
- original diploma/certificate or a certified copy;
- authorized translation into Estonian, English or Russian if the diploma/certificate is not in one of these languages;

- original transcript and/or other additional documents or their certified copies;
- authorized translation into Estonian, English or Russian if the transcript or additional documents are not in one of these languages.

When seeking assessment for a higher education qualification, documents with supplements attesting to previous education, beginning with the first post-secondary qualification, should be attached.

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC may ask the applicant to supply any other related documents if they are relevant to the evaluation of the qualification and to establishing the correspondence.

### **3.2. If an educational institution or an employer seeks assessment**

The educational institution or the employer, with the qualification holder's consent, shall submit the following documents to the Estonian ENIC/NARIC:

- all documents enumerated under 3.1. or their copies certified by the educational institution or the employer as "KOOPIA ÕIGE" ("TRUE COPY");
- a written request for assessment.

## **4. Assessment criteria**

In assessment and establishing a correspondence the following criteria are taken into account:

- The educational or any other institution which has awarded the qualification

In the assessment the following criteria are considered: whether or not the home country of the institution has joined the relevant international agreements, the type of the institution, its status, accreditation or any other quality assessment decisions, and recognition by a competent authority in the home country.

- The qualification

In the assessment the following criteria are considered: the qualification and the level of education required by the programme completed, programme goals and content, specialization, learning outcomes and graduation requirements.

The formal rights of the holder of qualification for further studies or for access to the labour market in the system in which the qualification was issued are also considered.

In assessment the requirements for the completion of the same or a similar programme within the Estonian system of education are taken into account.

## **5. The outcome of the assessment**

As a result of the assessment the Estonian ENIC/NARIC issues a written statement about the institutions and employers as to the correspondence of the level of the foreign qualification to that within Estonian education system.

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC can make a recommendation for full recognition, partial recognition or for denial of recognition. In case of partial recognition or denial of recognition the applicant shall be notified in writing of the reasons for the decision, and recommendations for further studies in order to obtain a recognized qualification can be made.

If the recommendation is for partial recognition or to deny recognition, no correspondence to a qualification in the Estonian education system is established.

## **6. The status of the evaluation statement**

The evaluation statement concerning a foreign educational qualification issued by the Estonian ENIC/NARIC is informative, giving advice both to the holder of qualification and to the higher

education institution, the employer or any other institution to which the educational document confirming a foreign qualification is presented.

The final recognition decision about the foreign educational qualification rests with the higher education institution, the employer or, in the case of regulated professions, the respective competent recognition authority.

### **7. Application processing fees**

The assessment of foreign educational qualifications by the Estonian ENIC/NARIC is free of charge.

### **8. Application processing deadlines**

The Estonian ENIC/NARIC shall provide a written evaluation statement within 30 days, counted from the time all the necessary documents have been supplied. In case of delays in processing, the applicant shall be notified in writing of the reasons for the delay.

### **9. Appealing the assessment decision**

The applicant has the right to appeal the outcome of the assessment of a foreign educational qualification if:

- assessment procedures have been violated;
- the applicant believes that the information contained in the evaluation statement is not correct;
- the applicant contests the decision regarding the comparability of the foreign qualification to the qualification in Estonian education system;
- the applicant contests the recommendation to recognize the qualification partially or to deny recognition.

The applicant shall file a written appeal with the Estonian ENIC/NARIC within 30 calendar days of the date of the decision, stating the reasons for the appeal.

### **10. Final clauses**

The applicant has the right to request information from the Estonian ENIC/NARIC about the Estonian education system and the relevant legal instruments, including agreements with foreign countries, regulating the recognition of qualifications.

## Annex E3. Higher Education Act

Passed 20.02.2019 <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/529082019022/consolide>

### Principles of studies at level of higher education

(1) Studies at the level of higher education consist of three levels:  
1) the first level involves bachelor's studies and studies in professional higher education;  
2) the second level involves master's studies;  
3) the third level involves doctoral studies.

(2) The basis for studies at the level of higher education is a study programme that provides for the objectives and learning outcomes of the studies, the standard duration of the programme, the standard workload, the conditions of commencement of the studies, the list of courses, the possibilities of specialisation, and the conditions of completion of the studies.

(3) The language of instruction of the study programmes of the first and second level of higher education is Estonian or, by a decision of the higher education institution, a foreign language, provided that it is necessary for ensuring the quality of the studies or the availability of specialists with higher education and the resources required for the studies in the foreign language are available.

(4) By a regulation, the Government of the Republic establishes the higher education standard setting out the following:

- 1) the uniform requirements applicable to studies at the level of higher education;
- 2) the principles of recognition of prior learning and work experience;
- 3) the general requirements applicable to academic staff and the principles of establishing special requirements;
- 4) the learning outcomes of studies at the level of higher education;
- 5) the study programme groups serving as the basis for the classification of study programmes and the right to provide education as well as other bases of classification of study programmes.

(5) The Ministry of Education and Research verifies the compliance of a study programme with the requirements provided by legislation and registers a compliant study programme in the Estonian education information system.

(6) A higher education institution establishes the grounds for the organisation of studies on the basis of the higher education standard specified in subsection 4 of this section.

## Annex E4. Standard of Higher Education

<https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/524092014013/consolide>

The **Standard of Higher Education** is a source document in issuing the right to conduct studies in **higher education** level, in institutional accreditation and in quality assessment of study programme groups for **educational** institutions providing **higher education**.

### PRINCIPLES OF RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

#### § 11. Purpose of recognition of prior learning and professional experience

The purpose of recognition of prior learning and professional experience is to:

- 1) increase educational and professional mobility of persons, including persons with special needs, and enhance opportunities for life-long learning;
- 2) enable recognition of outcomes of studying in the educational system consisting of cycles (formal education), other organised study activities (non-formal education) and learning through professional experience and during everyday activities and during leisure time (informal education) equally to compliance with the admission requirements specified in clause 12 (3) 1) of this Regulation or with learning outcomes achieved by completing a study programme;
- 3) enable educational institutions to respond flexibly to changes in the labour market and change of labour needs.

#### § 12. General principles of recognition of prior learning and professional experience

(1) The educational institution shall establish the conditions and procedure for recognition of prior learning and professional experience of students pursuant to clause 14 (3) 4<sup>1</sup>) of the Universities Act or clause 9 (4) 5<sup>1</sup>) of the Institutions of Professional Higher Education Act.

(2) Establishing of the conditions and procedure for recognition of prior learning and professional experience and submission of an application, evaluation of an application and making of the decision on recognition and contestation of the decision on the basis thereof shall be based on the principles set out in the Administrative Procedure Act and this Regulation and quality requirements prescribed by legislation and established in educational institutions.

(3) Recognition of prior learning and professional experience may be applied under the conditions and pursuant to the procedure established on the basis of subsection (1):

- 1) for compliance with the admission requirements established by the educational institution;
- 2) for transfer of credit points upon completion of a study programme;
- 3) for calculation of prior learning and professional experience as credit points.

(4) The assessment and recognition of prior learning and professional experience shall not apply to compliance with the graduation requirements specified in subsection 7 (2), subsection 8 (2) and subsection 9 (2) of this Regulation.

(5) An educational institution shall:

- 1) inform students of the conditions and procedure for recognition of prior learning and professional experience, including the terms and costs relating to the assessment which shall be borne by the student, and the possibilities for contesting the results;
- 2) ensure availability of the necessary information and supervision and counselling services for applicants for recognition of prior learning and professional experience;
- 3) ensure the uniformity of the procedure for recognition of prior learning and professional experience and the competence and impartiality with regard to the result of the persons who conduct assessment;
- 4) establish opportunities for assessors to participate in in-service training and co-operation network;
- 5) organise, in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Research, the creation of support systems, including an advisory system and a co-operation network of assessors, for recognition of prior learning and professional experience.

### **§ 13. Principles for certification and assessment of prior learning and professional experience**

(1) Outcomes of prior learning are certified by a corresponding diploma, certificate or another document certifying education.

(2) Studies which were carried out through professional experience and within the framework of everyday activities and leisure time shall be certified by reference to the works prepared and presentation thereof, a folder of samples, a professional certificate, a copy of the contract of employment or the directive of appointment to office or other documentary evidence. Upon certification of professional experience, a description of professional experience and a self-evaluation shall be appended to the application.

(3) The board of the educational institution has the right to establish additional requirements for certification in addition to the provisions of subsections (1) and (2).

(4) An educational institution has the right to assign practical tasks to a person, interview a person or value the knowledge and skills of a person in any other manner, as necessary, in order to evaluate the prior learning and professional experience of the person.

## Annex E5. Estonian Business School Academic Regulations

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### **6. Accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL)**

6.1 EBS recognises prior learning and work experience on the basis of individual grading.

6.2 In the fulfilment of the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral programme, EBS recognises the previous studies and work experience pursuant to the principles provided in the Standard of Higher Education. The recognition of prior learning and work experience is carried out according to EBS procedures.

6.3 The assessment of the prior learning and work experience shall be based on the relevance to the aims and learning outcomes of the programme, study module or subject. During assessment the compatibility with university's set standards is being looked at. Assessment criteria for APEL are:

- 1) prior learning and work experience is in logical connection to the aims and learning outcomes of the programme, study module or subject;
- 2) prior learnings prove that all intended learning outcomes have been acquired;
- 3) application forms are filled in correctly and added documents prove acquirement of all intended learning outcomes and are authentic.

6.4 While recognising prior learning experiences from a previous study level, it is necessary to make certain that the study load of the first and second study level is in total 300 ECTS. The gap needs to be compensated with taking extra elective or optional subjects, if there is a need.

6.5 The basis for the recognition of academic attainments at other universities is an academic certificate issued by the relevant university.

6.6 Same level studies can be transferred to optional courses in the amount stipulated in the curriculum.

6.7 A student can't apply for APEL for courses he/she has already registered for (except for internship) or if he/she has received a negative final grade from the course. An application that has received a negative decision can't be submitted without substantial renewal.

6.8 The final theses and final examinations at the same educational level in other universities are not recognised as prior learning.

6.9 The recognition of the level of academic attainments is vested with the Head of the Office of Academic Affairs who shall be entitled to, should the assessment require, ask the student for syllabi and involve the related Head of Study Level.

6.10 The recognition of academic attainments shall be formulated and transferred by a protocol with the date of their accomplishment, drawn up by the Office of Academic Affairs and signed by the Head of the Office.

6.11 The level of non-formal studies and work experience is assessed and recognised by a Commission called and chaired by the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs.

6.12 In the event of well-grounded circumstances the Head of the Office of Academic Affairs can ask the Commission to evaluate previous academic attainments.

6.13 In order to have the non-formal learning and work experience recognised the student shall submit an application during the period from August 20 to May 15, with the relevant documents about his/her learning and work experience to the Office of Academic Affairs. The documents shall



be passed on to the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs who shall be accountable for the assessment procedure.

6.14 The Commission shall be entitled to require explanations from the applicant in writing about the academic record, acquired knowledge, skills and authenticity. Should it be necessary the Commission may organise an examination of the knowledge and skills by informing the applicant about the procedure.

6.15 The Commission shall make a decision about the recognition of the prior learning and work experience within 30 calendar days from the date of application. The decision shall be formulated in writing and signed by the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs.

6.16 The fees for the assessment of prior learning and work experience shall be regulated by a decree of the Rector of EBS.

## Annex E7. Recognition of Prior Learning at University of Tartu

### Taking previous studies and work experience into account (RPL)

Taking previous studies and work experience into account is regulated by the [Study Regulations](#) and the [Conditions and Procedure for Recognition of Prior Learning and Professional Experience in Degree Study](#).

Previous studies and work experience are taken into account at the request of the student. The student must submit an application to the Dean's Office of the Faculty. The application is evaluated by the Faculty's RPL Committee that must reply to the application in writing within one month from the date of submission of the application. Applications submitted for the completion of the curriculum are not reviewed in July.

Previous studies and work experience may be taken into account in the completion of the curriculum without limitation, but it does not apply to final examinations and defending graduation papers.

[Application form for taking into account previous studies and work experience](#)

[Annex 1](#) (taking courses/continuing education into account)

[Annex 2](#) (taking work experience into account)

In addition to the application and the corresponding annex, the student must submit documents certifying studies (the original and a copy), e.g. a diploma, extract of the diploma supplement, a document describing the substance of the studies and other materials (e.g. portfolio, description of work experience, creative work, etc.), unless the completion of the course has been proven in the Study Information System. The applicant is responsible for the accuracy of submitted documents and other materials.

External students, part-time students who pay for the studies on the basis of the credit point price and non-UT students applying for admission to a vacant study place have to pay application fee depending on the volume of the application. The fee is 7 euros per credit point applied for, except in the following cases. The fee is paid before evaluation.

The review and evaluation of the application is free of charge in the following events:

- the applicant is a full-time student who has no limitations related to previous higher education studies in Estonia;
- evaluation of courses completed earlier at the University of Tartu is applied for;
- evaluation of compliance of previous studies with the terms of admission is applied for;
- the student does not have to pay the tuition fee, as he/she a) has a moderate, severe or profound disability; b) is a parent or caregiver of a child under the age of seven years or of a child with a disability; c) studies in the Teacher Training curriculum and works as a teacher; or d) studies in the Master's programme in Nursing.

If the applicant is discontent with the reply received to the application for taking previous studies and work experience into account, the decision can be [appealed](#).

There is at least one [RPL Advisor](#) in each Faculty or College, who gives advice in issues relating to previous studies and work experience.

No RPL application is needed for the recognition of prior learning in the following cases:

- the student is transferring courses taken at another higher education institution on the basis of the [study plan](#);
- the student is rematriculated to the same version of curriculum he/she has studied earlier;
- the student is changing curriculum;

- recognition of study results has been agreed on in the joint study cooperation agreement between education institutions;
- applicant for Master's studies has completed a curriculum which matches the prerequisite curriculum in terms of content.

If you did not receive an answer to questions relating to previous studies and work experience from your Faculty, you can contact by e-mail [vota@ut.ee](mailto:vota@ut.ee)

## Appealing decisions relating to taking previous studies and work experience into account

If the applicant is discontent with a reply received to an application submitted for the purpose of taking previous studies and work experience into account, the applicant can appeal it.

The initial appeal must be filed either orally or in writing with the same person or committee who made the decision concerning taking the previous studies and work experience into account.

If the person (or committee) who made the decision does not change the decision, the student can appeal to the Dean within seven days after the announcement of the appealed decision.

The following appeals must be submitted in writing.

[Appeal of a decision concerning taking previous studies and work experience into account](#) (form in Estonian).

A copy of the appealed decision and, if possible, additional document supporting the appellant's position (original copies and copies) should be appended to the appeal.

The procedure for appeal, the possibilities of resolving appeals and the time limits of replying have been set out in the [Study Regulations](#) of the University of Tartu.

## What is RPL?

RPL is a process, which in simplified terms means that it is possible to take into account knowledge and experience acquired anywhere when fulfilling the admission requirements or completing a study programme in order to avoid learning what has already been learnt. RPL benefits those who wish to continue with their unfinished studies or change their speciality, as well as those who wish to apply for the accreditation of knowledge and skills gained from additional training, work and other experiences. In addition, it is possible to use RPL in awarding professional qualifications and planning a career in general. **RPL is an opportunity!**

## RPL at Tallinn University

Recognition of prior learning and work experience in Tallinn University is regulated by Study Regulations. Recognition is based on whether the acquired knowledge, skills and experience are suitable in content. Applying for RPL is free of charge for the students of Tallinn University as well as those who apply for RPL when fulfilling the admission requirements, fees for external students and non-students.

**In Tallinn University it is possible to recognize prior...**

degree studies (courses) in completing the curriculum <u>continue reading</u>	training, work and other experience in completing the curriculum <u>continue reading</u>	experience in fulfilling the admission requirements for MA and PhD <u>continue reading</u>
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## The process of RPL

1. step: Familiarizing yourself with the aims and principles of RPL
2. step: Counselling and the applicant's self-analysis
3. step: Composing the application
4. step: Submitting the documents
5. step: Assessing the application
6. step: Informing the applicant of the decision and feedback

PS! Prior to applying for RPL it is important for the applicant to conduct self-evaluation, gather evidence and compose the application. In order to avoid complaints about submitting an inadequate or surplus application, it is advised to consult an RPL counsellor beforehand.

## Contacts and counselling

For additional information and counselling it is possible to turn to the RPL Counsellor of the academic unit supervising the curriculum (usually study coordinator).

## Annex 6. Case of Ireland

### Recognition of Prior Learning in Ireland – national level and local level

#### National Level: Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) State Agency



[Home](#) [Who We Are](#) [What We Do](#) [How We Work](#) [Who We Work With](#) [Events](#)

## Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

### About RPL

The recognition of prior learning (RPL) describes a process used to evaluate skills and knowledge gained through life outside of formal education and training, for the purpose of recognising life achievements against a given set of standards or learning outcomes.

### Legal framework for RPL in Ireland

The [Qualifications and Quality Assurance \(Education and Training\) Act 2012](#) sets out the statutory basis for QQI's engagement with RPL, mainly through our responsibility to establish policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression (ATP) for providers.

On the basis of QQI policies, providers then establish ATP procedures that they will implement. These must include policies on credit accumulation, credit transfer and identification and for the formal assessment of the knowledge, skill and competence previously acquired by learners (Section 56 (1), (2), (3)). The Act (amended) also states that providers without designated awarding powers may make a request to QQI for an award to a learner who has met the standards of that award based on the assessment of previously acquired learning. A University or Institute of Technology can, in line with their own ATP procedures make awards, including certificates, diplomas and degrees on the basis of assessed previously acquired learning.





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*Number 28 of 2012*

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## **QUALIFICATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE (EDUCATION AND TRAINING) ACT 2012**

**56.**—(1) The Authority shall, as soon as practicable after the establishment day, establish and publish, in such form and manner as it thinks appropriate (including on the internet), policies and criteria for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners.

(2) Each relevant provider and linked provider shall, as soon as practicable after policies and criteria are established under *subsection (1)*, in accordance with those policies and criteria, establish procedures for access, transfer and progression in relation to learners to be implemented by the provider concerned.

(3) The procedures referred to in *subsection (2)* shall include procedures for credit accumulation, credit transfer and identification and formal assessment of the knowledge, skills or competence previously acquired by learners.

**Principles and Operational Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions published by National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (now called Quality and Qualifications Ireland)**

<https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Principles%20and%20Operational%20Guidelines%20for%20RPL%202005.pdf>

**Principles for the recognition of prior learning**

The principles for the recognition of prior learning are addressed to education and training providers, awarding bodies, and those in the workplace. The principles are available to those who are developing systems of recognition of prior learning and to those who wish to make use of the prior learning that has been recognised by other providers or awarding bodies.

*General*

- The recognition of prior learning will give value to all learning, no matter how that learning is achieved.
- Participation in recognition is a voluntary matter for the individual.
- The recognition of prior learning will be part of an inclusive approach to learning by education and training providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for access, transfer and progression to education and training and for the achievement of an award.
- Recognition of prior learning will provide opportunities for learners to participate on an active basis in society in general and within a workplace context.

*Quality*

- Recognition of prior learning should be fully embedded within the quality assurance procedures of providers and awarding bodies.
- Recognition of prior learning should maintain the standards of the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.
- Processes for the recognition of prior learning should be credible to all stakeholders.
- The outcomes-based approach of the National Framework of Qualifications supports the attainment of awards through diverse routes, including the recognition of prior learning, and such recognition of prior learning will maintain and support the standards associated with the National Framework of Qualifications and its awards.

*Communication/documentation*

- A clear statement of the policies, processes and practices of the education and training providers and awarding bodies for the recognition of prior learning should be available to all users.
- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be clearly documented.
- Processes and practices for the recognition of prior learning should be communicated openly and clearly to all. (Applicants, education and training staff and assessors).

*Assessment*

- Assessment criteria for the recognition of prior learning should be published, made explicit to applicants, and applied consistently and fairly.
- Assessment criteria should be based on learning outcomes of awards or standards of knowledge, skill and competence set out in the National Framework of Qualifications and by the relevant awarding bodies.
- Assessment and verification mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning should be appropriate and fit for purpose.

### *Process*

- Guidance and support should be available for applicants and all involved in the processes of recognition of prior learning.
- An appropriate appeals mechanism should be in place.
- Recognition of prior learning processes should be easy to understand, fair and transparent, and be conducted in a reasonable time frame.
- The recognition of prior learning processes should be organised in such a way that they do not create barriers for the applicant.
- Appropriate resources to support the processes for the recognition of prior learning should be in place.

### **Official Policy of *Quality and Qualifications Ireland State Agency***

It is a policy of the Qualifications Authority to promote the co-ordination and harmonisation of processes for the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers and awarding bodies. It sees the development of national principles and operational guidelines as a first step in this direction. There are a number and a variety of different approaches to the recognition of prior learning on the part of education providers, awarding bodies, in the workplace and elsewhere.



## RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL)

UCC Policy Document

### INTRODUCTION

Government policy in Ireland has increasingly aspired to widening opportunity for lifelong learning with emphasis on social inclusion, equity of access to higher education, wider participation and partnerships with community, educational and business organizations. Consequently education providers, including higher education, must acknowledge the significance of learning obtained in a breadth of contexts prior to admission and formulate policies to enable formal recognition of such learning.

The aim of this policy document is to provide a coherent framework for the recognition of prior learning in University College Cork.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process that allows students to gain admission to a programme of study or to gain exemptions/credit from some parts of a programme, based on demonstrated learning achieved prior to admission. UCC recognises that knowledge and skills can be acquired from a range of learning experiences. The policy provides opportunities for **access, transfer and progression** to education and training at third level. While flexibility in structures and increased opportunities for entry to UCC programmes and transfer between programmes (intra and inter institutionally) are central to the principles of RPL, it is essential that academic standards for all programmes are maintained.

### CONTEXT

This policy has been developed in the context of the National Skills Strategy and has been formulated in accordance with the following:

- HEA. *National Plan for Equity of Access to Education 2008-2013*. In its recently published 5 year plan the National Office for Equity of Access has the stated policy objective of progressing 'the lifelong learning agenda through the development of a broader range of entry routes' and explicitly commits to 'support the development and implementation of a national action plan for the recognition of prior learning.' (HEA, 2008, 13, 48.)
- NQAI *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the implementation of a national approach to credit in Irish Education and training* (NQAI, 2004, 23).
- OECD. *Thematic review and collaborative policy analysis recognition of non-formal and informal learning: Ireland*. Recommendations contained in the OECD report of the review visit to Ireland in February 2008: 'From a lifelong learning perspective, broad provision of RPL would be logical so that a wide array of citizens can use RPL as an instrument to access education [and] to measure their existing skills, knowledge and competences.' (OECD, 2008. 65).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is an important element of EU policy for widening access to qualifications and supporting lifelong learning. The Irish Government has made a commitment to support RPL.

### DEFINITIONS

Prior learning is learning which has taken place prior to admission to a programme. Such learning can be certified or experiential.

**Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL)** is a process of formal acknowledgement of formal (certified) learning that has taken place and has been recognised prior to student enrolling on a programme. It may support the applicant's application for **admission** to a programme or allow for **exemptions** from some parts of a programme.

**Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL)** is a process of awarding credit for learning that has not previously been accredited, that is, experiential learning (both non-formal and informal). It may

support the applicant's application for **admission** to a programme overall for **exemptions** from some parts of a programme.

Experiential learning is achieved parallel to mainstream systems of education and training and does not lead to an award. Experiential learning includes:

Non-formal learning, which can take the form of organised, structured or planned training that may be assessed but does not lead to formal certification.

Informal learning encompasses learning gained through life experience in work, community or other settings.

*For the purpose of this policy document the generic term RPL will be used and will incorporate both terms, Recognition of Prior Certified Learning (RPCL) and Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL). RPCL and RPEL will be used where precise clarification between the two terms is required.*

## **UCC RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING POLICY**

The following principles apply to the implementation of RPL within UCC.

### **1. General Policy**

- 1.1** Recognition of prior learning is a part of UCC's procedure for the admission, exemption and the award of credit.
- 1.2** All Colleges are required to ensure that their policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning are clearly stated and documented, and readily available to all applicants, academic and administrative staff as required.
- 1.3** The modules and programmes eligible for recognition of prior learning shall be identified and specific assessment criteria and procedures shall be defined, documented and made available as required under 1.2.
- 1.4** The focus of the RPL process shall be on the achievement of learning outcomes rather than the experience of learning.
- 1.5** The first point of contact is the College which is responsible for overseeing the RPL application process. The final decision regarding the granting of exemption for admission or transfer rests with the appropriate academic unit, in consultation with relevant officer(s) as appropriate and shall be reported to the relevant Examination Board.

### **2. Quality Principles**

- 2.1** The policies and procedures for the recognition of prior learning are embedded within the quality assurance procedures of UCC. Therefore they shall be included in the academic regulations of each programme as appropriate.
- 2.2** The academic standards for the outcome of the RPL process must be maintained in such a way that the academic standards of awards of UCC are maintained.
- 2.3** In defining their arrangements, Colleges shall ensure that their process of application, assessment and recognition shall be comprehensive, transparent, consistent and fair, and conducted within a reasonable time frame.

### **3. Assessment Principles**

- 3.1** Specific RPL procedures shall be put in place by individual programmes and modules at the design stage and if implemented, post-programme approval shall be approved by College Council in accordance with College procedures.
- 3.2** As part of the assessment for RPL applicants must demonstrate that they understand the theory as well as the practical learning elements of the module.
- 3.3** In seeking recognition under RPL prior learning must be evidenced in writing or through the medium appropriate to the particular learning outcomes of the module and accompanied by authentication as necessary.

- 3.4** For RPL the learning outcomes refers to learner’s knowledge, understanding, skills and/or competences, i.e. what the learner knows and can do to the required standard as a result of prior learning.
- 3.5** Recognition will normally be given:
- For complete modules only;
  - Where all of the learning outcomes of a module have been achieved;
  - It is at the discretion of each programme to determine the proportion of credit which may be awarded at each stage of study up to a maximum of 50% of the total credits available for the programme overall. There is no requirement that credit is granted at any stage of a programme and, in particular, programme co-ordinators shall be mindful of professional and statutory body requirements and the appropriateness of awarding RPL in the final year.
- Candidates will normally be entitled to apply for exemption for entire modules only, not parts of them. Exceptionally, when the module is composed of clearly distinguishable and distinct parts, for example theory + practical components, exemptions from a component may be permitted with the approval of the College Council in accordance with agreed College procedures.
- 3.6** Credit gained by RPL cannot be double-counted for purposes of second qualification at the same level.
- 3.7** The applicant is responsible for submitting relevant evidence in accordance with appropriate programme-specific guidelines. An applicant who is admitted via RPL and is found to have submitted false or misleading evidence is in breach of the University regulations. False or misleading evidence is a disciplinary matter and in all cases will be referred to the Student Discipline Committee.
- 3.8** Upon a submission of RPL application and relevant evidence, the applicant will be given feedback on the judgement and may be permitted to re-submit on one subsequent occasion.
- 3.9** The student record entry in respect of RPL is undertaken within the Student Records and Examination Office upon notification by the Examination Board.

#### **4. Assessment Criteria**

The following key criteria will be used by staff to help them to determine if the evidence of learning presented is appropriate and sufficient.

- 4.1** Validity Does the prior learning presented match the learning outcomes required by the relevant module? Is the prior learning being presented by the applicant at the academic level required.
- 4.2** Sufficiency Is there sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved?
- 4.3** Authenticity Can it be verified that the prior learning is that of the applicant?
- 4.4** Reliability Is the evidence of prior learning presented reliable?
- 4.5** Currency Is the prior learning achieved and being assessed current? Is it up to date with current knowledge and practice?

#### **RPL PROCESS**

1. The applicant initiates the process by providing appropriate outline information in support of their application for RPCL and for RPEL.
2. Consultation shall be arranged in accordance with College procedures and applicants shall receive advice and guidance for preparation of evidence and verification of prior learning in the required format.
3. Initial judgment is made by the programme co-ordinator or designated member of staff as to whether the application for RPL is appropriate and the process may continue. If decided that it should continue, the applicant must then submit evidence of learning by providing the required detailed information to support the application within the specified timeframe.

4. The learning evidence shall be submitted to the programme co-ordinator or designated member of staff who shall make the submission on behalf of the applicant to the relevant College authority.
5. The outcome of the assessment process once verified shall be notified to the Examination Board as part of the student profile for assessment and the outcome reported to Student Records and Examinations Office for entry onto the student record.
6. The recommendation on the outcome of the assessment process for RPL prior to verification by the Examination Board shall be notified to the applicant within a reasonable period of time.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

It is for Colleges to design and agree local arrangements for the implementation of this policy in keeping with the universities strategic activities (Leading Action point 3 and 4, page 11 and Key Projects numbers 2, 3 and 4, page 18) and in the context of subject and professional body requirements.

### **REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed, in the first instance within two years from the date of adoption by Academic Council and a full policy review will be undertaken after five years. The review will be led by the Vice President for Teaching and Learning.

### **In conclusion (recommendations):**

- Draw up an RPL policy for your institution.
- Frame it in the national context.
- Set up clear guidelines for assessment of applications.
- Build in the personal touch.

### **Recommendations to make the most of RPL opportunities**

- Ensure at the **Entry Requirements stage** of writing the programme that you include an **equivalence clause**. This will ensure flexibility, openness and inclusion.
- An equivalence clause encourages **life long and life wide learning** and is **an invitation to all learners** to participate.
- Where evidence of Learning Outcomes is being provided, encourage this as a **reflective process**, rather than a box ticking exercise.
- Ensure that **programme and module design are inclusive** of all learners – a **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** approach from the beginning can ensure participation for all.
- 'R' also stands for **Respect**, for **Responsive** and for **Risk-taking**. Trust the candidate and be innovative and visionary.
- See the bigger picture of **holistic, integrated learning for all**.

## RPL: Selected References and Links

- HEA (2015) *National Plan for Access to Equity of Education*: <https://hea.ie/policy/access-policy/national-access-plan-2015-2019/>
- National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (2015). *Current Overview of Recognition of Prior Learning in Irish Higher Education*. Available at: <https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/NF-2015-A-Current-Overview-of-Recognition-of-Prior-Learning-RPL-in-Irish-Higher-Education.pdf>
- National Qualifications Authority Ireland (2005) *Principles and Operational Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning in Further and Higher Education and Training*. Dublin: NQAI: <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Principles%20and%20Operational%20Guidelines%20for%20RPL%202005.pdf>
- National University of Ireland: RPL  
[http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce\\_docs/Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning.pdf](http://www.nui.ie/about/pdf/gvrnce_docs/Recognition%20of%20Prior%20Learning.pdf)
- OECD (2008) *Thematic Review: Recognition of nonformal and informal learning*: Ireland <https://vince.eucen.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Ireland-Formal-Documents-2-2008-Country-Note.pdf>
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013) *Green Paper on the Recognition of Prior Learning*. Available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Green%20Paper%20-%20Section%204.7.pdf>
- *Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act* (2012). Dublin: Office of the Attorney General. Available at: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/28/enacted/en/html>
- RPL policy at Munster Technological University (formerly, CIT – Cork Institute of Technology) Available at: <https://www.cit.ie/rpl>
- Sheridan, I & Linehan, M. (2009) *Recognition of prior learning: A focus on practice*. Available at: <https://extendedcampus.cit.ie/contentfiles/REAP%20publications/recognition-of-prior-learning-a-focus-on-practice.pdf>
- UCC Academic Strategy: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/regsa/dpr/academicstrategy/AcademicStrategy2018-2022.pdf>
- UCC RPL Policy: <https://www.ucc.ie/en/media/support/academicsecretariat/policies/learningandteachingpolicies/RecognitionofPriorLearningPolicy.pdf>
- University Sector Framework Implementation Network (FIN). 2011: *Recognition of prior learning in the university sector: policy, case studies and issues arising*. Dublin: IUA. Available at: <http://www.nfqnetwork.ie/fileupload/FIN%20REPORT%20%28Fin>

## Annex 7. Case of Poland

### Recognition of Prior Learning in Poland

#### Polish legislation:

- Act on the Integrated Qualifications System (2015)
- Act on higher education and science (2018)
- Regulation on the 2nd level characteristics of learning outcomes for qualifications at levels 6-8 of the Polish QF
- Institutional regulations (resolutions of the University Senate, Rector's orders)

#### Act on the Integrated Qualifications System

- Polish Qualifications Framework: 8 levels (corresponding to the EQF)
- Full and partial qualifications
- Integrated qualifications register <https://rejestr.kwalifikacje.gov.pl/>
- Framework for validation of competences
- The Act does not specify validation and certification requirements, quality assurance principles and supervision rules in the higher education system. Particular solutions shall be determined by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education

#### Act on Higher Education and Science

Art. 71.

1. A university may confirm learning outcomes obtained in the learning process outside the study system to applicants for admission to a particular field, level and profile if it has:
  - 1) a positive assessment of the quality of education at these studies, or
  - 2) scientific category A +, A or B + in the discipline referred to in art. 53 section 1, or the leading discipline to which this course is assigned.
2. Learning outcomes are confirmed to the extent corresponding to the learning outcomes specified in the study program.
3. Learning outcomes are not confirmed for study programs referred to in art. 68 paragraph 1 points 1-10 (physician, dentist, pharmacist, nurse, midwife, laboratory diagnostician, physiotherapist, paramedic, veterinarian, architect, teacher).
4. Learning outcomes can be confirmed to a person who has:
  - 1) documents referred to in art. 69 clause 2 and at least 5 years of professional experience - in the case of applying for admission to first-cycle studies or uniform master's studies;
  - 2) full qualification at level 5 of the Polish QF or a qualification awarded under the foreign higher education system corresponding to level 5 of the European qualifications framework referred to in Annex II to the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning - in the case of applying for first-cycle or uniform Master's degree studies;
  - 3) full qualification at level 6 of Polish QF and at least 3 years of professional experience after completing first-cycle studies - in the case of applying for admission to second-cycle studies;
  - 4) full qualification at the level of 7 PRK and at least 2 years of professional experience after completing second-cycle studies or uniform master's studies - in the case of applying for admission to the next first or second degree studies or uniform master's studies.
5. As a result of confirmation of learning outcomes, no more than 50% of the ECTS points assigned to the classes covered by the study program can be counted.
6. The order of admission to studies depends on the result of confirmation of learning outcomes.

7. The number of students who have been admitted to studies on the basis of confirmation of learning outcomes may not be greater than 20% of the total number of students in a given field, level and profile.

#### **Remarks**

- The Act on Higher Education and Science clearly shows that RPL is a paid service.
- Fees for their provision are university's income. They should be fully self-financed.
- Charges for services can be up to 20% higher than the cost of providing them.
- Information on the scope of the service and its price should be clearly communicated and publicly available.
- The organizational framework and quality of RPL services are evaluated by the Polish Accreditation Committee

#### **Application of RPL at Polish universities**

- empirical study conducted by IBE (2018-2019) - obtaining knowledge about the formal processes used by Polish universities to confirm learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning (RPL)
- sampling and implementation of the study:
- Stage I: 322 universities out of 393 located in the Register of higher education institutions were analysed about the possibility of confirming the learning outcomes using RPL (Until August 1, 2018),
- Stage II: 55 Individual D Interviews and 4 Focus Group Interviews were conducted with representatives of various types of HEIs

#### **Some general conclusions from the analysis of collected research material**

- RPL is not working / is a marginal practice,
- If it works, then rather at private universities,
- If it works, it is rather in practical fields of study
- RPL works if there is a "promoter" at the university, someone who believes in the sense of this solution
- Motivations are based on reasons other than just the desire to increase the number of students
- The image of the university as open to the needs of various groups is important
- Lack of support, information campaign, willing
- RPL is not financially viable

#### **Challenges and barriers**

The social, cultural, organizational and legal aspects that are interrelated affect the success of RPL implementation in Polish HEIs.

- threats to the values attributed to traditional higher education and the social and educational role of universities,
- misunderstanding in the academic environment of the idea of LLL,
- concerns related to organizational and administrative burdens that arise from the need to implement and use the RPL procedure,
- lack of adequate knowledge on how to develop and implement RPL,
- no explicit criteria on how to assess the professional experience required by law,
- validation of learning outcomes: a difficulty or a big challenge is to make reliable verification of learning outcomes outside of formal education. The assessment is always at least partly arbitrary

- the difficulty is to create validation methods and tools for highly academic faculties, e.g. philosophy
- Admissibility and credibility of evidence of possession of learning outcomes: Candidates have a problem with preparing a set of credible evidence that actually confirms their learning outcomes.

### **What distinguishes the Polish RPL system in higher education from well-developed RPL systems in other countries?**

- High degree of institutionalization at the level of central regulations - very precisely defined boundary conditions for the provision of services (strict criteria of university access to the provision of services, strict parameters of the requirements for joining the procedure, max 20% of students can be admitted on the basis of RPL, max 50% ECTS can be obtained through RPL , etc.). This is due to concerns about the quality of these services, as well as the impact of the dissemination of these services on the quality of formal education - especially at private universities.
- Generally, a complete lack of activities aimed at disseminating knowledge about RPL; lack of information about benefits for individuals, employers, education and training organizations; complete lack of promotion of RPL services in society.

### **What makes the RPL procedure at a Polish university different from good practices in other countries?**

- Lack of education and vocational (career) counselling services. The candidate chooses the field of study him-/herself and the subjects that (s)he wants to have recognised, prepares his/her application him-/herself. There is no help, no hint - neither individual nor collective.
- There are no experts at the university who are prepared to assess learning outcomes acquired outside formal education.
- Lack of information about RPL services in the university environment, academic teachers.
- There is no support system for academic teachers to understand the essence of RPL and the specifics of this educational service.

### **Jagiellonian University**

- Resolution of the University Senate 51/VI/2019 (26 June 2019) on the organization of confirmation of learning outcomes
- Rector's Order No 50 (18 May 2020) on the detailed procedure of confirmation of learning outcomes and admission mode based on confirmed learning outcomes
- Recognition Commission (5 members) nominated by the Rector for a 4-years term
- The Commission can nominate experts for study areas
- Recognition concerns study modules (course units) for given study area
- Fees:
  - Recognition tax – 100 PLN (~23 EUR)
  - Recognition procedure – 350 PLN (~80 EUR) for 1 ECTS

### **RPL Process**

1. The applicants apply for confirmation of learning outcomes up to 30 April (application form, proofs/certificates etc.)
2. After formal verification, the Commission is preparing a contract to carry out the procedure of confirmation of learning outcomes
3. The applicant signs the contract and pays a fee



4. The Commission carries out the procedure (if necessary, with additional exams) and issues a certificate on confirmation of learning outcomes or informs the applicant that the confirmation has been refused. The deadline is 31 August.
5. The certificate is a basis for admission; applicants' results are compared and ordered according to the ranking list, according to the obtained qualification results (the sum of the ECTS points obtained as a result of confirming individual course units multiplied by the grade obtained for these course units).

Up to now: nothing has happened!

#### **Remark on Level 5 (Law on HE, 2018)**

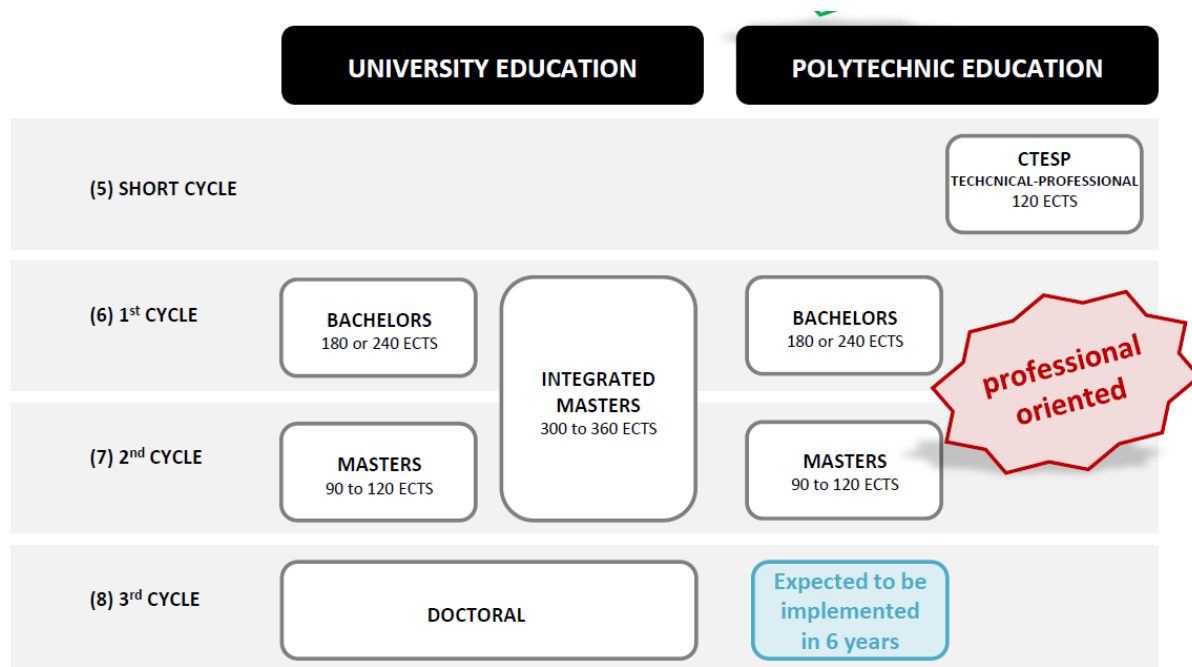
Art. 161.

1. Specialist education shall last not less than 3 semesters and shall enable obtaining a full qualification at level 5 PQF.
2. The specialist education program determines the learning outcomes taking into account the universal characteristics of the first degree specified in the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualification System and the characteristics of the second degree specified in the provisions issued on the basis of art. 7 item 2 of this Act. The program provides classes shaping practical skills.
3. The condition of completing specialist education is obtaining learning outcomes specified in the specialist education program.
4. A person who completed specialist education receives a certificate of a qualified specialist or a certificate of a qualified technologist specialist. Specimen certificates are specified by the university.

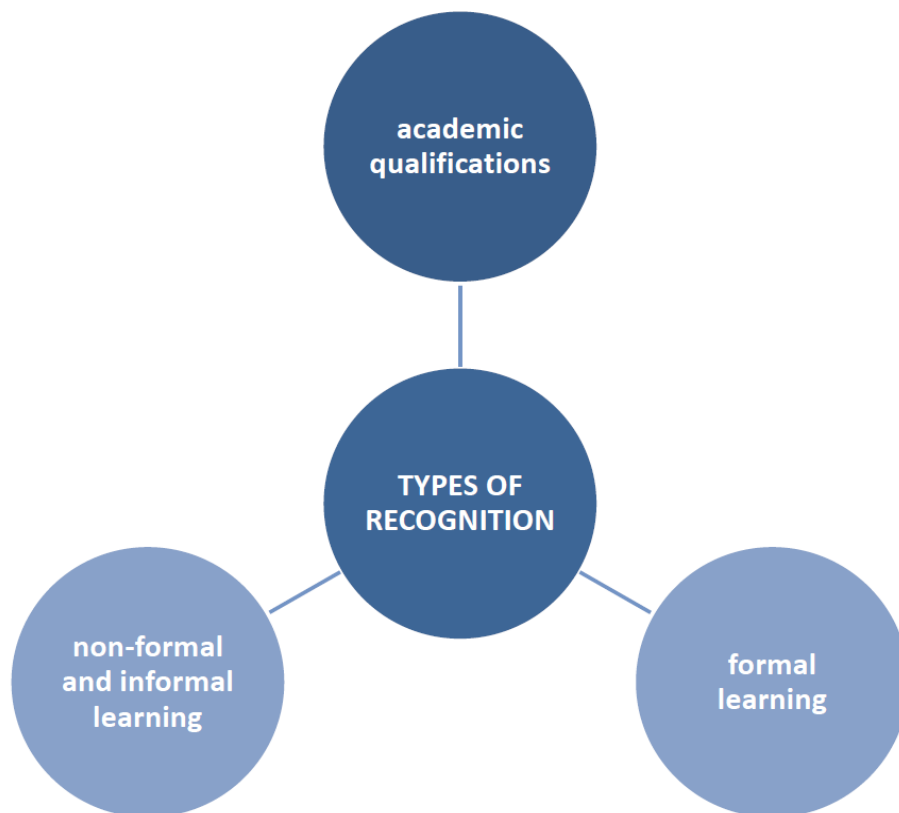
## Annex 9. Case of Portugal

### RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

The case of Portugal



The Bologna process recognizes and values different forms of learning, formal and non-formal, acquired through teaching or professional experience.



## 1- Recognition of academic qualifications

Recognition of higher education degrees and diplomas awarded by foreign HEIs is regulated by Decree-Law no. 66/2018 <https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/degree-and-diploma-recognition>

### 1. Degree recognition

1.1 Automatic Recognition

1.2 Level Recognition

1.3 Specific Recognition

#### 1.1 Automatic Recognition

Recognizes a **higher education foreign degree or diploma** that are included in the **official list of degrees and diplomas** approved by the commission appointed by the Portuguese government.

The list is the output of a previous analysis which is based on criteria such as identical level, objectives and nature in relation to Portuguese degrees of bachelor, master, doctor and short cycle diplomas

**Competent authorities** 1. Directorate-General for Higher Education 2. Public Higher Education Institutions

**Formula for the grade conversion (to 0-20 )**

$$C_{\text{final}} = C_{\text{max}} \frac{C - C_{\text{min}}}{C_{\text{min}} \times 10 + 10}$$

<https://www.dges.gov.pt/en/pagina/degree-and-diploma-recognition>

#### 1.2 Level Recognition

Applied when the degree is not included in the list of degrees of automatic recognition (1.1). In this case, the degree level from a foreign higher education system is recognized, individually and by comparability, with the **corresponding qualification level** of a Portuguese academic degree or diploma.

**Competent authority** 1. Public Higher Education Institutions

Decision based on: *precedence* or *jury*: 1. President/Rector of the university 2. Two teachers/researchers on the specialty.

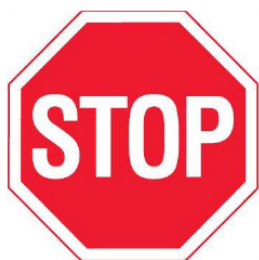
#### 1.3 Specific Recognition

It is the act that allows the recognition of a degree or diploma from a foreign higher education to be **identical to a Portuguese academic degree or higher education diploma**, through a casuistic analysis of the level, duration and programmatic content, in a certain area of formation, branch of knowledge or specialty.

**Competent authority** 1. Public Higher Education Institutions

Decision based on:

*jury*: 1. President/Rector of the university 2. Two teachers/researchers on the specialty



## LIMITS TO THE RECOGNITION

	Level 5 max (%)	BSc-MSc max (%)	total max (%)
<b>prior learning</b>			
Technical-Professional diploma (level 4)	50	33	
Technical-Professional diploma (level 5)		50	
<b>curricular units</b>		50	
non-degree courses (national or foreign)		50	
<b>other training</b>		33	66
professional experience		33	
more than 5 years of professional experience	50		

**Internships/dissertation/projects of doctoral and masters programs cannot be subject of a crediting process !**

### 2. Recognition of formal learning

The legal regime for academic degrees and diplomas of higher education (Decree-Law no. 74/2006) regulates **mobility of students between higher education institutions**, with the following objectives:

- To replace the traditional equivalence system with a new framework reference facilitator that allows **crediting previous education or training**, either within the scope of higher education cycles (national or foreign), or through their **professional experience**.
- To allow student mobility **between national HEIs** in the same or different subsystems, as well as **between national and foreign HEI**, which is ensured by the European credit transfer and accumulation system (ECTS), based on the principle of mutual recognition of training and acquired skills.

#### General principles of crediting

- Crediting does **not intend to assess the "equivalence" of contents**, but rather the **recognition of the level of competence and its adequacy** to the scientific areas of the study cycle in which the student enrolls for further studies
- Crediting procedures takes into consideration the level of the credits and the area in which they were obtained
- **Recognition of professional experience** converted into ECTS credits for the purpose of pursuing studies and obtaining an academic degree, should result from the **demonstration of effective skills, learning and knowledge** resulting from that experience

#### General principles of crediting

- Crediting is never partial, it is a proceeding associated to a unique curricular unit
- Crediting procedures should prevent the double crediting of professional experience and certified education

### 3. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning

Methods of assessment that can be used in Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra when **crediting professional experience**:

- **Portfolio** assessment that mainly includes documents and works presented by the student revealing knowledge and skills that may be credited
- Assessment **interview**
- Assessment based on a **project, a work, or a set of works**
- Assessment based on **demonstration of competence** or **observation in the laboratory** and in other practical contexts
- Assessment by **written exam**
- Assessment based on a **mix** of previous evaluation methods and/or others to be defined

Whatever assessment methods are used, the following **principles** should be guaranteed:

- Adequacy of professional experience to learning objectives and skills to be acquired
- Demonstration of fundamental knowledge and critical thinking skills
- Evidence of up-to-date knowledge

### Recognition of formal, non-formal and informal learning

#### Crediting process

- Involves the **scientific council** and a **jury** for this specific purpose may be nominated

#### Effects of crediting

- Crediting gives **recognition of curricular units** (courses) included in the study plan of students